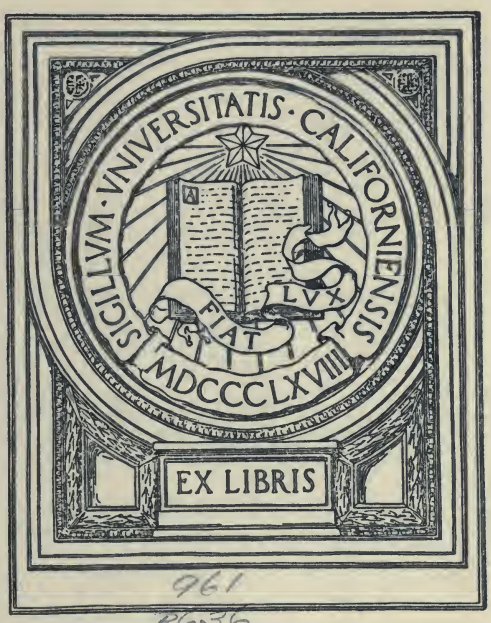
THE VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

RICHARD BLAKER

CHAUNCEY WETMORE WELLS

1872-1933



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This book belonged to Chauncey Wetmore Wells. He taught in Yale College, of which he was a graduate, from 1897 to 1901, and from 1901 to 1933 at this University.

Chauncey Wells was, essentially, a scholar. The range of his reading was wide, the breadth of his literary sympathy as uncommon as the breadth of his human sympathy. He was less concerned with the collection of facts than with meditation upon their significance. His distinctive power lay in his ability to give to his students a subtle perception of the inner implications of form, of manners, of taste, of the really disciplined and discriminating mind. And this perception appeared not only in his thinking and teaching but also in all his relations with books and with men.

Miss Elsie M. Cormick
1421 P[illegible]ton Ave
Alameda, Calif.

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The Voice in the Wilderness

The Voice in the Wilderness *by*

Richard Blaker

Jonathan Cape
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IN MEMORIAM
C. W. Wells

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To My Wife

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Book One: Chapter One

§ 1

CHARLES PETRIE'S household had consisted, till the morning of a certain November day about thirty years ago, of his wife, his three daughters and his son Conrad.

Petrie himself is omitted from the list deliberately, to indicate that the household was divided, quite patently, into two sections. Petrie's section consisted of Petrie alone. His camp was his bedroom and his study, and it was only circumstances of an unusual and very special nature that drew him out of it.

His eldest daughter, Sylvia, had that day married the chief Cashier of a Pelchester bank, and had left the parental home for ever.

It was not that fact, however, that accounted for Petrie's being seated at the kitchen-table. It was another fact; namely, that winter had not yet been officially recognised and his study fire had not been laid. The evening was surprisingly cold, and the kitchen was the only warm place in the house. Also he had heard his wife going upstairs, to bed.

Before him, on the table, were a heap of papers and writing materials and a cracked saucer to hold burnt matches and the scrapings of his pipe.

He leaned back in his chair, with his hands clasped behind his head, his lips twisted into a wry smile about his pipe-stem, and his gaze fixed vacantly upon Cynthia, his second daughter, as she stood at the sink. He stared as a man will stare at the antics of a fly upon the ceiling.

If he had been studying his daughter instead of the reflections that gave the wry twist to his lips, he would have seen a lithe, graceful girl of eighteen, with his own slender length of form and fine strong hands. From him, too, came the

luxuriance of her hair and its natural wave, while its flaxen colour was the mother's. He had contributed the large, shadowy brown eyes and finely chiselled nose; Mrs Petrie had given the small, gentle mouth. Only her chin was distinctively a feature of her own, neither square nor pointed, but already solid and modelled into harmony with her cheeks and throat. As her chin was at eighteen, so it would always remain. There was nothing superfluous in the material that made up her face. Therein it was like Petrie's.

The distortions of his features were no passive result, the mere decay of surplus tissue; for he was still well under fifty. They were the active construction of the things that lay within him; the disdain that spread his nostrils and wrinkled his cheeks by pushing them still higher upon his cheekbones; suspicion that drew his brows together and held them in a knot; and bitterness that drew a line of shadow below his tight-shut lips.

His neighbours in those days were, for the most part, whiskered and moustached; Petrie was shaved scrupulously clean. They wore vast, cruel collars; Petrie a soft, negligible one and a bulging, black cravat. That, quite roughly, gives Petrie's estimate of his neighbours.

His neighbours' estimate of him was, in a word, that he was a musician. Though he no longer lived by the profession and practice of music, but had another and quite definite profession, no one ever referred to him as anything but "Petrie the musician," or "You know—that musical chap."

His neighbours, however, went further than this: he was a failure—a dead and utter failure.

At the age of fourteen he had appeared, with his father, as a prodigy violinist. At fifteen he went to Paris and from Paris to the Conservatoire of Music at Holzgarten. When he was twenty-two he reappeared in London. With him was his wife Elizabeth, whom he had carried off from a Pension for the daughters of English gentlemen. She was already a little afraid of Petrie. She resented the old St George's Hall that kept him out, playing its piano, till one o'clock each morning; his talk agitated her and his silence got upon her nerves. It was then that Sylvia was born.

Cynthia was born at Leeds seven years later. The birth of yet another daughter five years after Cynthia only served to confirm the mood of bitterness and general pessimism into which the father was gradually falling. This daughter was Freda. When Conrad was born after an interval of three more years, Petrie had got beyond making any comments upon incidents of this description.

It was the mother who chose the name for the boy, out of the faint, vague love she had for homogeneity in things. "Conrad" fitted in better with the girls' names than James or Thursby, her father's names. To have called him Charles, after his own father, in addition to being inharmonious with the names of her daughters, would have involved a risk greater than Mrs Petrie cared to take. You never knew, in those days, 'where you were' with Petrie. He had not quite settled down into his coldly cynical phase, and could, at times, find a *casus belli* in a sunbeam, or the way you stuck a postage stamp upon a letter. He might have seen a gibe in his son's being named after him; he might have considered it an attempted trespass upon his privacy. You never knew. . . . The fact, at any rate, remains that his boy was christened Conrad.

The children had had hushed, quiet infancies; for their mother always kept them unobtrusively out of Petrie's way. Conrad alone of the four knew him as one to be merely ignored—as one ignores, in practice, the functions of Saturn or the moon. With the girls it was slightly different; they had known him in a state of transition—from rebellious pessimism to his cold acceptance of a futile world—and he took his transitions very hard.

Their early associations of tantrums left a restraint and defiant suspicion which persisted in their dealings with him, even after they knew that he would say nothing at all. Their awe of him, and of everything that distinguished him from other men, was associated in their minds, somehow, with the word 'Holzgarten.'

He took the house in Pelchester when Conrad was two, and the taking of the house was a symbol of his settling down and becoming a less aggressive and violent, if not more amiable, individual. It was the family's first experience of a secure

livelihood; of the difference between a salary and an artist's fees.

The salary was, at first, a hundred and eighty pounds, that of organist and choirmaster of Saint John's Church.

Thus established, Petrie signified, in the two local papers, his willingness to take advanced pupils in music (theory and technique). He signified also his reluctance to do so, for the fees he demanded were so enormous, that at the end of eighteen months he had no more than four pupils (and of these only one studied music).

His failure to establish a teaching connection was not due to the fact that there was no money in Pelchester, or that Petrie's efficiency was ever doubted. There was, on the contrary, plenty of money in Pelchester, and nobody ever thought of questioning Petrie's ability. Many, in fact, were proud of Petrie; but there was merely no demand in Pelchester for expensive music lessons. The men of Pelchester were tradesmen and their necessary parasites—doctors, undertakers, solicitors and vets. They were hard-headed, go-ahead and cheery fellows who all seemed to be about forty years of age, all in their business prime of life, with all their businesses at a critical and absorbing stage of development. In a word, the business renaissance of the Provinces was in full swing, and Pelchester with its hundred thousand or so inhabitants was in the thick of it.

Petrie first demonstrated, by his own failure, the utter futility of music as a profession, and then demanded for an accomplishment and a mere hobby the price that people might have been persuaded to pay for a career. In music, therefore, he acquired only one pupil—the delicate son of a widow.

It was the manufacture of boots and shoes, by the firm of Pudleigh & Walker that had brought the Mayor of Pelchester a fortune of which the rest of Pelchester was very proud. This firm, at the time Petrie came to the town, was beginning to find a foreign market.

Petrie, it was said, could speak five languages—though few people had heard him speak at all. The Mayor had a son of eighteen, and to Petrie came this son to study French and

German. After him came others, and when the boot manufacturer had been out of his civic office a year, it was found that the foreign market for Pelchester boots and shoes was developing more rapidly than Petrie's first pupil's fluency in foreign languages. Petrie accordingly received a letter from Pudleigh & Walker, inviting him for a salary of a hundred and fifty pounds, to undertake the foreign correspondence of the firm.

He called at the office and enquired how many letters per week he would be required to write and read. He then closed his eyes and made a rapid calculation. With his eyes still closed he said "No," then he opened his eyes and said, "Two hundred." He added that he must be permitted to do the work where he pleased, and within reasonable limits, *when* he pleased. His terms were agreed to, and either because he was a lazy man, or else, as some said, to avoid cutting his own throat by raising possible rivals in the linguistic arena, he refunded the balance of their fees to his pupils, and informed them that they were his pupils no longer.

On Pudleigh & Walker's new note paper, under the list of branches and the names of the Directors, there appeared the words, "Foreign Secretary, Charles Petrie, Esq."

The first result of this legend was a boisterous guffaw from Petrie when at last he noticed it after writing half a dozen letters under it. The second was a letter from Shepherd, Mostyn & Barter, Export and Import Provision Merchants.

To them, since they required slightly more work of him than the others, he suggested three hundred pounds as his salary, with the same qualifications as to time and place. On being offered two hundred and twenty-five he put on his hat. On being asked what he would do about the Dutch correspondence (since a great deal of the business consisted of importing eggs and butter from Holland) he said that he would meet the Dutchmen half way, and give them the choice of either French or German as a medium of communication.

A memorandum of agreement was drawn up and signed, and on his way home from signing it Petrie called at St John's Vicarage to ask the Vicar to find a new organist as soon as possible.

The Vicar was sorry; he liked Petrie. He asked him how a natural musician could hope to live without music in his life. The musician replied by asking if he, the man of God, would worship any the worse or any the less if he were to give up boiling the pot by it.

That, briefly, is how Petrie came to abandon music as a trade, and to have a salary of five hundred pounds for work which he performed in about four hours a day, either in the snug little offices of frosted glass in Highway Buildings or Westridge House, in his study, in his bed, or—if there was no other warm room in the house, and the majority of the family had gone to bed—in the kitchen.

The statement that his daughters learnt, at a very early age, to play the piano has been omitted just as naturally as the statement that they learnt to talk; for, as Petrie himself once remarked, the fact that they could all "play" was no more an indication that they were musicians than the fact that they could talk and read and write were indications that they were Demosthenes or Shakespeare.

. . . . . .

Petrie refilled and lighted his pipe, and fell again to peering at Cynthia through the smoke that curled, undriven, from his mouth and nostrils.

Peering thus, he seemed for a moment to be conscious of her, to be taking her in; then again his gaze became detached and sightless. He lowered an eyelid and twisted up a cheek to protect his eye from the slowly rising smoke.

". . . And so," he said, "the game goes quietly on. Same old fight . . . in the same old circle. . . . Well, he's a jackanapes, as I said before, so it can't matter a tinker's curse to anyone. . . . *She'll* win, of course; she's won already."

Cynthia was piling up plates and cups and saucers. She made no comment.

"Forgotten?" Petrie asked. There was a slight difference in his tone—just the difference, in fact, that distinguished his practical from his theoretical remarks, which to the rest of the family were negligible.

"It isn't much after nine yet," Cynthia said, and to prove

it she craned her neck to look at the clock on the mantelpiece ; " you've never in all your life wanted it before ten."

Petrie wrily smiled and puffed. " Well, well, well," he said ; " bless me if you're not all alike ! You win, Cynthia ; win quite easily. But what earthly use is mere victory like that to you ? It isn't that I don't see the thing ; I do—perfectly . . . Cynthia assumes the portfolio of chief cook and bottle washer, *vice* Sylvia, wedded. She intends to have no misunderstanding as to who *is* c.c. and b.w. She knows that as things begin, so shall they continue. The lawful hour of thirst, authorised and established, is ten o'clock. Hence our Cynthia quenches the first symptom of unlawful and premature thirst with a glance, a superior gesture of confident appeal to the impartial witness that ticks above the hearth and hastens or retards our destinies. Cynthia thus establishes herself. She wins. Why does she want to win ? Simply because she knows she *can* win. Her method of open, honest truculence may change as she discovers its inadequacy as a weapon, but her motive will remain ever the same—to kill for the mere sake of killing. . . . Speak I not words of wisdom, O daughter ? "

Cynthia shrugged her shoulders. " It's all Double Dutch to me," she said.

Flights of that sort on Petrie's part were usually described by the younger generation as " trying to be funny." Cynthia therefore continued, quite leisurely, to put away the dishes.

" Speak I them, nevertheless," said Petrie.

This was followed by a short silence, which Petrie broke by saying, suddenly, " Tell me, Cynthia—will she be missed ? "

" Who ? " Cynthia asked casually, just to show the stuff she was made of, though she knew who perfectly well.

Petrie, amused by her antagonism, said, " I allude to my firstborn. I was wondering, for a moment, if you would miss your sister. Your mother, I know, is desolated. She retired an hour ago, under the blow, to bed ; and yet the fact that the girl had attained the ripe age of twenty-five in spinsterhood was always a source of grave anxiety to her."

He had never alluded to Mrs Petrie like that before. The

slight did something to Cynthia so that she flushed and trembled. The man was the one thing in her experience of which she had ever been afraid. She turned to him; and placing her hands on her hips, she slowly drew herself up, as though uncoiling, to her full indignant height. "L—let me tell you," she stammered, "mother has a very great deal to put up with." She could not make herself any clearer than that. She had not, in fact, any idea of what she wanted to say; but she felt, vaguely, that she had said a tremendous lot; she had said it through a throat parched and choky.

The wry twist of Petrie's lips melted slowly into a dim but real smile. "Cyn," he said, with a surprising gentleness, "brew a dish of tea for me to consume, even before it is time. I have much of affairs before me to-night, concerning the sale of boots in Paris and Lille and the purchase of butter in the marts of Rotterdam. Furthermore, I must indite words in dudgeon to a poulterer of Vlissingen, concerning the vintage of twenty-seven eggs chosen at randon from a consignment of four thousand. Difficulties beset me in this; I am unaccustomed to criticising, in French, the flavour of eggs acquired through the medium of that language. Also, it strikes me as fundamentally unjust, for the shells alone must be worth the miserable price we pay for the complete eggs. My heart will not be in the work; it will be fiction; and I am paid for writing letters, not literature—another injustice, but we will let it pass."

Cynthia was again at the sink, swinging some hot water round in the teapot. A lump had followed the dryness and the choking into her throat, and she was indignant with it. It might have been his saying "Cyn" so gently and suddenly instead of 'Cynthia' that had brought it, for no one had called her by a diminutive before; it might have been the flicker of a smile with which he said it; it might, again, have been the way he reverted from that tone to the old one of lifeless banter. Or it might have been nothing of the sort, but only that she had had a tiring day, and being stared at and talked to were putting the finishing touches to her weariness.

She took the teapot into the larder and there defeated the lump, and also touched her eyes with her handkerchief.

She made the tea, and in pouring out a cup for Petrie as he wrote, it occurred to her how thirsty she was, and that she might just as well have a cup herself. She took a second cup from the dresser and filled it. Petrie looked up and raised his eye-brows.

"Observe!" he sneered; "the common bereavement draws father and daughter together, so that they scald their sorrow in the humble bowl of tea."

There was nothing for Cynthia to say. She only wondered why he always, sooner or later, said something of this kind; and why it was such a pity that he did it.

They drank in silence and Petrie returned to his papers. Cynthia poured out a second cup for him, and began to set a large square tray on which his breakfast would be carried to his bedroom or his study in the morning, according to whether his boots were still outside his study door or whether they had disappeared.

While she was counting out the rashers for the morning, Petrie looked up and said dreamily: "So—she has a great deal to put up with, has she? Curious how it never occurs to people that if my ill-humour is unpleasant for *them*, it's much worse for me. They only get the steam, so to speak, while *I* am stewing right in the thick of it. Yet I'm quite cheerful as I simmer away, and don't raise many objections—taken all round."

The remark irritated Cynthia, because she knew there must be a catch in it somewhere, and she couldn't see the catch. It impressed her, all the same.

Upstairs, undressing in the bedroom which till that morning had been Sylvia's, the lump came back to her throat, the moisture to her eyes.

It was not the going away of Sylvia that saddened her; for there had never been much companionship between the two. Sylvia's engagement for the last two years had added an official recognition to the superiority of her years. The sisters had either ignored each other or disagreed about most things. By Sylvia's going Cynthia had lost nothing. She had, in fact, gained. She had gained the kudos in the house at which Petrie had jibed, and the comfortable bedroom

instead of the stuffy little attic. Yet there was something desolating even about the new bedroom; she had attained it through the occurrence of a casualty.

She knew quite well what she would have said to Freda or Conrad if she had discovered them crying as she was, as they got into bed; and yet she continued to cry, and to yearn in her loneliness for she knew not what—for the moon, as she would have told either of the children.

And she was puzzled by her father. He had appeared astonishingly good-looking in that fraction of a second when he had called her "Cyn" and almost, it seemed, stretched out his hand to her; and she could not, for the life of her, discover the fallacy in his last remark.

Then it occurred to her how sodden her mother's handkerchief must be with tears, how wet and crumpled her pillow. Forthwith she dried her own eyes and turned resolutely over, to elaborate one or two details of improvement in the scheme of housekeeping as Sylvia had bequeathed it to her.

. . . . . .

Petrie, for his part, did not make any immediate change in his position or expression after Cynthia had gone. He smoked quietly and mumbled unintelligibly. Once only did he deliver a whole sentence, and that he delivered with a thrust of his pipe-stem at a ring of smoke in front of him; "So—the knaves and the strong men live while the fools and the weak ones die. . . ." Softly whistling a random bar, he drew a foot out of a shabby slipper and walked to the fire to knock the ashes out of his pipe. Then he straightened up and stretched himself. The way he did this was the way Cynthia had done it—from the waist upwards to the broad shoulders and strong neck. Half-way through the gesture he noticed what he was doing, and he smiled.

"Bless my soul!" he said, and he completed the stretch, exaggerating it to mimicry. Again he said, "Bless my soul! . . . 'My mother has a very great deal to put up with.' . . . Truculent as a blessed Dago."

His pipe once more alight, he sat down to his papers. "Confound and damn these eggs. . . . It is indeed more

blessed to give than to receive—to sell, in other words, than to buy" ; and he began again to write.

Judging from his expression when he had finished it, the letter he wrote to the poulterer of Vlissingen was a document both subtle and humorous.

"Really, you know," he chuckled, "I ought to pay to be allowed to do this kind of thing. . . . It's a sense of *values* that people seem to lack most. . . ."

§ 2

Petrie's boots had gone from his study door the next morning, so it was to the study that Cynthia took his breakfast tray.

He was seated upon the piano stool, staring at some sheets of manuscript propped above the keys. Without looking round he said, "I'll leave this thing on the piano somewhere. It's marked with a 'Z' so that you can identify it. I'd like you to try it over and see what you make of it ; you might have to copy some of it out first, where it isn't very clear. I want the pencilled corrections to stand."

"I'm afraid I shall be at Melton all day to-day," Cynthia answered, making room for the tray on his desk.

That, normally, would have ended the conversation ; but Cynthia was not altogether surprised that it did not end it. The talk of the night before, she felt, was an advance of some kind from the old positions.

Petrie said, "Oh ? . . . So Sylvia has bequeathed her *clientele* to you."

"Just the Vicar's two girls," said Cynthia, "and Mr Wibleigh. He's doing some Oratorio work. . . ."

"I'll stay out a little longer then," said Petrie, "so that you will be able to have a look at it after you get in. I'm rather anxious to see if it penetrates easily to the intelligence of people."

The rule was that the girls could use the piano in the study while Petrie was sure to be out—from two o'clock till five. Petrie was calmly proposing an exception to it. "I shall be back about eight," he said.

The advance from the old position now was obvious.

Cynthia returned to the kitchen and made the tea. Then she called up the stairs, "Break-*fast*."

Conrad replied, "'bout time too," and made, as usual, more noise coming down the stairs in his stockinged feet than he succeeded in making booted.

"I do think, Cynthia," he said, looking round the kitchen, "that a fellow who has to be at school by nine might have his boots ready for him."

"There's nothing in the world to prevent his getting them ready, then—the night before," was Cynthia's reply. "Has mother taken her jug in yet?"

Conrad shook his head and knocked the soles of a pair of muddy boots together.

Cynthia, seeing his headshake, replaced one plate of bacon in the oven; for outward evidences in that family went a long way towards rendering verbal exchange unnecessary. Thus Petrie's choice of site for his breakfast was communicated not by words, but by the position of his boots; whether he was in or out, at one or the other of his offices, or out merely for a walk was indicated by the presence or absence of his hat and stick upon the hatrack, or by the presence of one without the other; for Petrie as surely left his stick when he went out on business as he took it when he went out on pleasure.

Now the fact that the jug of hot water that Cynthia had placed at Mrs Petrie's door was still there conveyed the message that her mother had had a bad night; that she would be down to breakfast late, or else not at all.

Cynthia had toasted only three pieces of bread—two for herself and one for her mother. Freda and Conrad in silent dudgeon ate bread untoasted with their marmalade, while Cynthia explained to them that if Sylvia had been so silly as to make toast for them, it did not in any way follow that she was as silly as Sylvia. It was only their haste that held them aloof from argument.

Just as they were finishing their meal Mrs Petrie came in.

"Why ever did you bother to come down, mother?" Cynthia said. "I could easily have run up to you with it after the children have gone."

"Children!" sniffed Freda.

"Children!" Conrad echoed. "Too old and mighty to make a fellow a bit of toast in the morning."

"Oh, my dears," Mrs Petrie said plaintively, "*please* don't start the morning quarrelling. . . . Thank you, Cynthia darling."

She settled herself wearily in her chair.

Conrad and Freda silently kissed her and hurried out. Both their presence and their hurricane departure alike failed to gladden her. She was not a small woman, but the way she carried herself made her appear, unless another normal person were near enough to give her scale, positively diminutive.

Her watery blue eyes and weary lids bore traces of desultory weeping in the night. Her pale face wore the expression of helpless, pessimistic pity that passes sometimes for kindliness.

Over her fading light hair she wore a lace boudoir cap, and as though to deny any aims that this touch of finery might possibly suggest, she held together, with her left hand, a shabby flannel garment that had belonged at some time or other to the children. This thing she invariably cast over her shoulders in preference to the perfectly good shawl that hung in her wardrobe beside it. She ignored its little sleeves so that they hung pathetically armless from her shoulders.

This shift of hers, together with her habit of fastening the collar of her dress with a large brooch till one of the girls tackled and overcame for her the row of beadlike buttons, were symbols of Mrs Petrie's defeat at the hands of life, and her consequent withdrawal from the household's active administration.

Her attitude in holding this garment suggested that she had just managed to save it, and it alone, to keep warm her narrow shoulders and withered bosom, from the disasters that had bereft her of all else. Her hold upon it was not a firm, defiant one; it was one of tentative appeal, with a loosely-closed, delicate little hand.

"Why didn't you stay?" said Cynthia, "and have a proper rest out?"

"Thank you, my dear," said her mother, "but you will have plenty to do now, without spending the morning running

up and down stairs with an invalid's tray. It was all poor Sylvia could manage, with you to *help* her. And now you will have no one till Freda is a little older. . . ."

"What possible difference can it make to anyone, whether I put your breakfast on to a tray or on to the table?" Cynthia asked. "And I've got to go upstairs at least once, and I might just as well not go empty-handed."

"I know I can't do *much* to help you, dear," and Mrs Petrie slowly pushed aside her plate," but the little I can do, I *shall* do."

"Besides," Cynthia added, "I shall have lots more help than Sylvia ever had. What about Mrs Simpson? She's coming all day now."

Her mother did not reply. She drew the shawl-substitute closer, till it became hopelessly entangled in the large brooch. From that moment Cynthia conceived a tremendous hatred for the shabby old flannel thing, and the unfastened collar that gaped about her mother's bloodless throat.

She squared her shoulders and began to collect the dishes with a dash and energy that would have sufficed for dishes wrought of solid steel.

Mrs Petrie sat limply back and watched her as she swung and leaned across the table to her task.

. . . . . .

§ 3

As Cynthia walked to catch the train to Melton, with her music case under her arm, she was getting away for the first time from a home that had become her own individual responsibility. In her hands lay the material welfare of them all; she would have to buy the coal and food and dish-towels; she, in future, would have to send for the sweep or the plumber and see that Conrad's boots went to the cobbler in due time. These tasks would be only complicated by Mrs Petrie's criticisms, and an occasional, quite irrelevant suggestion. But that was not all; the responsibility she felt was something more than that, something which she could not write down on a list to be marked off when done.

Her own analysis of it as she walked along got no further

than first a feeling of resentment, and then relief at the prospect of getting away from it for about eight hours.

She noticed, however, that she did not include Petrie in her burden. His aloofness and detachment caused her no distress; his sarcasm and remarks or scathing silences with his lips twisted up round his pipe-stem, caused her only to shrug her shoulders. He, in a word, was none of her business.

But she felt it very much her business that Mrs Petrie should wear a casual rag about her shoulders instead of a shawl, that she should hold her collar together with an antiquated brooch. She felt her mother's limpness as though she carried her upon her shoulders; she had to be carried, and Cynthia was the only one to carry her. . . .

In the compartment into which she climbed there sat a gipsy girl with a large basket of clothes pegs and some sprays of broom on her lap. Her skin was burnt and weather-beaten to a glowing brown. Her coarse black blouse was stretched tight across her firm, round breasts. Cynthia looked at the blatant strength of her, and saw that she looked out upon the world through fearless, sparkling black eyes.

"Looking out upon the world" very soon resolved itself into stealing merry glances at the youth who followed Cynthia into the compartment, with a carpenter's bag slung across his broad shoulders.

He returned the girl's glance with one as playful as her own and said, very brightly, "Mornin'."

Cynthia wondered, uncomfortably, whether she ought to try to find a seat elsewhere, but was saved the responsibility of decision by the train's starting.

In the window-pane beside her she could see the carpenter fidgetting about in his seat, smiling at the girl.

The muscles of his forearm ended in great knots above his wrists. His huge, square-fingered hands were spotlessly clean, and as he stuck his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat and drummed his fingers upon his chest, she could see the pink flesh moving under the skin. The neck-band of his shirt positively cut into the muscles that held up his curly head and tilted it a little towards the gipsy.

Cynthia slowly turned to gaze at him directly, without the

medium of the window-pane. When he caught her eye upon him she turned haughtily away, to ignore even his reflection in the glass, and to look through it, out of the window.

At the next station they moved to get out. Cynthia drew aside her knees to let them pass. The man took the girl's basket and handed it down to her. Closing the door he smiled, rather stupidly at Cynthia, and went off, helping with the basket of clothes pegs.

She heard him exchange a 'hullo' and a laugh with the porter who came spinning a milk can down the platform. She saw that the girl, too, had some chaff for him. What it was she did not hear; and it did not matter. The things that did matter were the lively swing of their stride as they walked along, the youth and the rude vigour of them, their breadth of bosom and shoulder. As she saw them, she saw, too, the picture that she always carried—her mother; delicate, wistful and bent. Life, to her mother, was an intrusion, a joyless burden. . . . And that exasperating flannel thing. . . .

Gertrude Chill was at Melton, the next station, with the trap to drive Cynthia to the vicarage.

"You're ever so much younger than your sister," she said, "I shouldn't wonder if you're younger than Mary even!"

Mary was her own sister, two years younger than herself, and she could not easily imagine anyone younger than Mary.

"Are you as clever as Sylvia?" she asked, as they waited at the level crossing for the train to go out.

"I don't know if I'm *cleverer*," said Cynthia, thinking still of the fine resilience of the gipsy girl and the carpenter, "I *play* a good deal better."

"Gracious!" said Gertrude Chill. It might have been an advance criticism of Cynthia's ability, or it might have referred to her calm, matter-of-fact estimate of her powers.

When, however, she had had lunch with them, and gone on to Mr Wibleigh's, the girls assured the Vicar that Cynthia was a perfect marvel—'Genius,' in fact, they were quite sure, was none too strong a word for her.

The Vicar merely smiled.

Many years before, with just their naïve enthusiasm, he had applied the same word to Cynthia's father.

Chapter Two

§ 1

THE night after her second visit to Melton, Cynthia took Petrie's tray into the study with his ten o'clock tea, and had the surprise of finding him in a position of actually waiting for her.

Five times a day (Tuesdays excepted) she usually took a tray to the study. Once a day (at five o'clock) the study was empty, and the other four times the transaction was quite as impersonal as the fifth. Her father would be at the desk bent over his papers, or in the armchair puffing smoke at the pages of a book. He would just barely move and say, "Oh—tea" (or 'breakfast' or 'lunch'), and then, purely by machinery, "Thanksverymuch." Cynthia's answer to this was just as mechanical: "It's all there, I think."

On this particular evening, however, Petrie was actually awaiting her. She felt as awkward at seeing it as she would have felt at finding her mother deep in some occupation of her own, and oblivious of her entry, not waiting for her.

He was seated, not in the armchair or at the desk, but on the desk chair which he had drawn up to the fire. In his hand he held the manuscript he had asked Cynthia to try over ten days before, the one distinguished from the other papers that littered the piano and the tops of the books in his bookshelves by a large capital Z scrawled across its top in blue pencil.

He looked up at her and drew a corner of the paper across his rough cheek. "Oh—tea!" he said, from the force of the old habit.

He motioned her to the armchair, where she sat down with the tray awkwardly upon her knees. "W—what did you make of these works that the father visited upon the children—head, or tail, or anything at all?"

"Nothing at all," said Cynthia, "till I'd copied it out. It's so smudgy."

Petrie laughed.

"Smudgy," said he, "is distinctly good. There are professional critics in London, paid intellectual parasites who would part with actual money for that accidental word of yours, Cynthia. Crooned over and nursed by them, it would become in time what they call among themselves a *mot juste*. Idiots! that is as far as their intelligence can carry them. They would use it prodigally at the risk—and it is generosity on my part, mark you, to call it a *risk*—of talking nonsense. Nonsense so utter as to be unanswerable. However, in this particular instance I am inclined to agree with you; it *is* a little—er—smudgy—particularly just here." With his pipe-stem he indicated a few bars on the third page.

Cynthia said, "There's a decent copy in my music case. I'll get it."

She went out and brought it and handed it to Petrie. "H'm," said he; "and was it as easy as all that to get rid of the smudginess?"

There was a line faintly ruled along the top of the first page in pencil, and under it was neatly printed in ink, "Charles Petrie." Petrie pointed to the line and smiled; "What is that for?" he asked.

"The name," said Cynthia; "what *is* it?"

Allowing the manuscript to fall into his lap, he groaned. "Oh Lord! 'What-*is*-it,' Cynthia? What in thunder does it matter *what* it is? It is music, my dear girl, not journalism—so it has no name, and requires none."

He picked up the sheets and thrust them towards her, and smacked them. "It is itself; it is *this*—just this particular set of sounds. If *it* doesn't tell you what it is, nothing in the world can, God help you."

The speech seemed to have tired him, for he leaned back in the chair. Shaking his head, he presently continued softly and sadly, "No, it isn't a noise like a cradle or a spinning-wheel or anything of that sort, if that is what you looked for; there is no rustle of angels' wings in it, or patter of the hind feet of fauns. Still—just for the sake of reference between us (should

we ever have cause to refer to it again)—it is—it is—well, what the devil is it? It is 'Opus Z.' Is honour satisfied?"

Cynthia shrugged her shoulders and watched him pouring out a cup of tea.

"Have some tea," said Petrie.

There was only the one cup on the tray, so she went out to get another.

As she crossed the hall Mrs Petrie called down the stairs to her, "On your way up to bed, dear. . . ."

"I'm not going just yet," said Cynthia, and went into the kitchen.

She was taking down the cup and saucer from the dresser when Mrs Petrie, the flannel thing over her shoulders, appeared in the doorway. "Dear," she said, "it's getting *very* late, you have *so* much to do these days. . . ."

"Oh in a minute, mother; don't worry so."

"Cynthia, you mustn't let . . ." Mrs Petrie began, and then caught sight of the cup in Cynthia's hand. Saying not another word she turned her suddenly frozen face away and went slowly upstairs. Cynthia was left with the feeling that she had done her an injury.

Petrie was sipping his tea when she returned. "No, Cynthia," he said thoughtfully. "It's just the same with pictures. By pictures I mean, of course, *pictures*; not topographical or physiognomical memoranda. They are no more 'September' or 'Portrait of my mother' than they are Blondin eating Breakfast, or Mr Gladstone playing marbles in the House of Commons. The most you can do by way of classifying and explaining pictures—besides, of course, pointing to them—is to number them." He looked up and smiled. "Presumably it is a hard saying." He said, "I gather from your look of contempt that you do not see my point."

Cynthia, as a matter of fact, did faintly see his point, but she did not bother to contradict him. The expression he took for contempt was one of deep, though somewhat bewildered, attention; for the tone of his voice was something quite new to her. She would have described it as 'natural.' It was unlike the voice which he used in 'being funny.' She felt sure that her silence would not discourage him.

She was right.

He looked up at the ceiling and said, "No. It's a perfectly absurd dodge, that effort to translate things untranslatable—into journalism."

"What I really meant, I suppose," said Cynthia, "was, is it meant to go by itself, or are you going to put some more to it?"

"Ah," said he, "that's quite fair. No one could find fault with a question like that. Well, what did you think? Would you call it a 'whole,' as the journalists say, or a 'fragment'?"

"I thought it went quite well by itself," she said.

"Good," said Petrie, "I meant it—to stick to your terminology—to go by itself. I do not, however, like your terminology because of its somewhat optimistic ambiguity. I cannot imagine 'Opus Z' *going* anywhere. Let us rather say *stay* by itself—Opus Z; an artistic whole. By Charles Petrie. Eh. Cynthia?"

The 'natural' tone had again gone from his voice, and he was trying to be funny. His lips twisted once more around his gurgling pipe-stem, and he stared into the fire.

"Shall I run through it?" Cynthia asked, and leaned forward to take the manuscript. Petrie, however, folded his hands upon it and shook his head.

She saw that his possibilities as a companion were exhausted, so she gathered the two cups together on the tray. "It's late," he said, apparently realising that he owed a remark.

As she picked up the tray, he bent forward and took away one of the cups. The dregs he tossed into the fire, and placed the cup on the mantelpiece. "That can stay here," he said casually; "it's always as well to have a spare cup about a room."

Upstairs, her mother's door was, as usual, ajar. Cynthia did not manage to tiptoe past it. Mrs Petrie softly called her, and Cynthia went in, yawning.

She found her seated before the dying fire, which gave the only light in the room. Noticing first this fact, and its corollary that her mother had definitely abandoned herself to 'resting' (which meant moping), she noticed next the accursed flannel thing around her shoulders. It had survived till now, for the

want of a pretext for its destruction. Pretext or no pretext, Cynthia decided in that instant the thing must go.

She took the matchbox from the mantelpiece and lighted the gas at its fullest possible candle-power, so that Mrs Petrie blinked her weak eyes in the glare of it. Then she looked long and searchingly at Cynthia, sadly apprehensive. Something in Cynthia writhed at the futility of the gaze.

"Are you quite *happy*, darling?" Mrs Petrie asked wistfully.

"Happy!" said Cynthia; "of course I'm happy, mother. Why ever shouldn't I be quite happy?"

Her mother shrugged her shoulders. "As long as my children are happy . . ." she began, but instead of finishing her sentence, she held out her arms.

Cynthia bent and kissed her cheek hurriedly, and said, "I want that old dressing-gown of Con's, mother, if you can spare it. I'll get your shawl."

"Yes, dear," said Mrs Petrie, "yes—of course you may have it." But she made no move to give it up. "What are you going to do with it?"

Cynthia took the shawl out of the wardrobe. "Oh, it'll come in very handy downstairs," she said, and took away the dressing-gown; "for—for dusters, and fomentations and that kind of thing . . . *very* handy."

"Fomen*tat*ions!" Mrs Petrie exclaimed. "Oh Cynthia —my dear! You are *ill*. I knew you could not be well; and you've said *nothing*. I have known from the very beginning that that Melton journey would be too much for you—in all weathers."

Cynthia, so far, had only been to Melton twice and both times in the same bright, crisp sunshine. She refrained from pointing this out. "Of course I'm not ill, mother; what should I be ill about? Only I want *this* thing."

She threw it over her arm, placing the *bona fide* shawl upon her mother's shoulders. Mrs Petrie did not resist, simply because she never did resist. Her hand, however, remained as though in forlorn protest upon her bosom, her fingers loosely clasped—upon nothing, now that the dressing-gown was gone.

"Good night, mother," Cynthia said. "Why don't you go to bed? I thought you were ready over an hour ago." Mrs Petrie kissed her, lingering in the embrace.

"You will tell me, dear," she said, "when you are unhappy, or troubled. *I* know how dreadful it is to feel alone."

"Yes," said Cynthia, "of course I will tell you—*when* I am unhappy." But as she went into her room, the one next her mother's, she knew that it was a lie. Her mother was quite the last person in the world to whom she would go in those circumstances.

She thought, incidentally, of her father . . . but he, too, was very far away. Even when his sneer did not isolate him, his love of cumbersome, long sentences did. . . .

She sat down upon the bed and began to tear up the baby dressing-gown. When she had it in five or six strips Mrs Petrie, having heard the sound, thrust her head in at the door, and then came forward in great alarm and placed her hands on Cynthia's shoulders.

"My *dear*," she said with rhythmic reproach, "you *are* ill. I *knew* it. . . . *Tur*pentine. . . . I *smell* it."

"Then you are very wonderful," said Cynthia; "for *I* can't. Mother, *please* don't be ridiculous. . . ." Then suddenly it all became too much for her and she laughed. "Here you are, mummy. You can have this thing back now. *I've* finished with it."

She handed her the mutilated garment; but Mrs Petrie did not respond to the laughter.

"I'm sure I don't know, my dear," she said coldly, "why I should be treated in this fashion."

Hurt, and utterly baffled, she went off to bed, absurdly carrying the fragments of the dressing-gown.

Cynthia closed the door behind her, and then with an impatient gesture, locked it.

She sat down upon the bed and wondered if everyone in the world were so utterly alone as she—'by themselves' described the condition she meant better than 'alone.' . . . Sylvia, for instance, who was still away at Brighton with her bridegroom. Was Sylvia, she wondered, alone? . . .

But thinking of things was not a particularly strong point

with Cynthia. So she stood up and yawned, and began slowly to undress.

Undressed, she very softly unlocked the door and got into bed. She wished that she had stayed upstairs in the attic. It might have been small and a little crowded, but it had, nevertheless, its points. . . .

§ 2

Mrs Petrie had never given the seal of her approval to Cynthia's expeditions to Melton. She had never opposed them, but when Cynthia set out each Tuesday morning, she set out unblessed. She went nevertheless, with head erect and music case under her arm, waving a gay adieu from the gate, refusing to admit that this visit was not the most ordinary and natural thing in the world.

Yet, for all this nonchalance, she knew, when she caught a cold about a fortnight before Christmas and the cold developed into influenza, that the disaster would be attributed to a wetting she got on the way home from the station on Tuesday, rather than to the fact that she had washed her hair the day before.

On Christmas Day she lay in bed, imagining the scene downstairs, and glad, on the whole to be taking no part in it.

On that one day in every year, Petrie dined with his family. Throughout the meal he had always sat, as far as she could remember, in precisely the same way—saying very little as he crumbled the bread beside his plate and stared at the children, obviously comparing them with themselves of a year ago.

George, the new son-in-law, was now added to the specimens under his scrutiny, a scrutiny merciless if not unkind.

A new person presented to Petrie was like a new conjuring trick presented to an intelligent boy. He did not believe in the magic of it, but he liked to see it. If he stared unduly, it was only because of his interest in the way the trick was done.

Cynthia could hear the sounds of crockery downstairs, and the sound of a voice which was probably Sylvia's, for Sylvia had a new assurance about her. As she lay and idly listened

she thought how wonderfully her mother had grappled with the difficulties caused by her own retirement.

Mrs Petrie had positively bustled about the house with a great sense of her importance and a tight grip on things. The bunch of keys that Cynthia had carried in her pocket and left, on Tuesdays, in the right hand drawer of her dressing table, Mrs Petrie carried proudly, like a professed housekeeper, at her belt. The shawl had gone from her shoulders, for it is difficult to bustle and carry a tray with a shawl on. For two weeks she had had no headache. . . .

George and Sylvia came up to see her before going on to tea with George's relatives. They treated her with the deference and subdued good cheer due to convalescents. After them came Freda and Conrad; Freda to remark that Sylvia was more stuck up than ever, Conrad to assert, in vague denial of this, that George had given him half a crown.

When Mrs Petrie came in with a cup of beef tea, Cynthia said, "Father in?"

Mrs Petrie looked at her in surprise. "How should I know, dear?" she said. "He was in to dinner as usual. . . . Drink that, darling, as soon as you can; while it's hot."

"Because, if he is in," said Cynthia, sipping the beef tea, "I think you ought to get out with the children for a little while. It looks perfectly lovely out—even if he isn't in, for that matter. I shall be perfectly alright."

Mrs Petrie visibly altered at this remark. Her brisk, almost soldierly attitude relaxed. She seemed, somehow, to shrink in stature. "Why should I go out, my dear?" she asked. "You know how nervous it makes me—going out, and meeting all kinds of people in the street."

"Don't *go* in the street then," said Cynthia; "go to Wilton's Hill. That's the place to go for a walk an afternoon like this." Mrs Petrie observed the rules relating to the treatment of invalids and convalescents: she did not answer. She looked out of the window.

Cynthia continued: "It must be two weeks—and more—since you were outside the house even. You will only get mopey again if you don't take a little change, mother; and you've seemed so much better lately."

Again Mrs Petrie did not answer; and then Cynthia said, from pure inspiration, "Very well then: if you won't, you won't, and that's all there is about it. You know that the children wouldn't have to go out by themselves on Christmas Day if *I* wasn't in bed." She turned over to give her speech an ending appropriate to its finality.

Mrs Petrie said, "Very well, dear. We'll go. Freda can tell your father."

When the door had banged behind the three, and after it the gate, Cynthia heard her father coming softly up the stairs. He tapped upon her door with his finger-nails and immediately came in.

He thrust his pipe into his waistcoat pocket and leaned his arms upon the bedrail. "So you did get ill, after all," he said, smiling the smile that automatically left a hole for his pipe-stem.

George, the brother-in-law, had said not exactly the same thing to her, but just the same kind of thing, and had bored her utterly with every word of it. The remark from Petrie was not the least bit boring—possibly because he himself was not bored by it.

"How did you know I said I wouldn't?" she asked.

"I did not know," he said, "I merely made a guess."

"And did you guess, too," she continued, "that mother said I *should* be ill?"

"No," said Petrie, "I was off it there. I ventured to think that she was sure you would die."

"Poor mother!" said Cynthia; but Petrie said nothing. "And what about you?"

"Oh, *I*," said Petrie. "You have yet to realise that I, Cynthia, am a Philosopher. All my thinking is directed to reality—that is, the Human Spirit. I do not waste time speculating about accidents. The only accidents worth two pins are Sound and Colour, and they are not worth troubling *other* people's heads about. But I must say, since I'm here, that influenza and bronchitis appear to agree with you. You are looking uncommonly well. I suppose you think with the rest of the world that the credit is due to that mossy-faced,

super-cravatted individual I saw ascending the stairs two days ago—a feat made marvellous by the tightness of his trousers. Bah, they're all alike, these doctor fellows—barbers every *one* of them ; barbers through and through ! "

" I suppose it's George," Cynthia said quietly, " that's upset your apple-cart."

" And who the blazes," said Petrie, " may George be ? "

" Good gracious," said Cynthia, " why—*George*, of course. Don't you know George yet ? "

" Screaming a thing," said Petrie irritably, " is not explaining it. I do wish you would realise *that*, although your sex is against you."

" George," said she, " is your son-in-law."

" Oh, *that* individual," sneered Petrie.

"Yes," said Cynthia, "he's upset your apple-cart all the same."

" Upset my apple-cart indeed ! " said Petrie truculently. " My apple-cart ! . . . a fellow like that ! The insolence of such a suggestion, and from *you* ! As though *anyone* could upset my apple-cart—presuming that ' apple-cart ' is a synonym of yours for ' mental equilibrium.' Look here, Cynthia. Let me tell you that it's their own apple-carts these people have upset ; and they spend their time trying to wheel them about upside down. . . ."

Thus started, it was inevitable that Petrie should, sooner or later, lose his temper or avoid losing it only by an effort, which was just as bad. Cynthia said, therefore, as soothingly as she could, " How's the Opus Z getting on ? "

Petrie glared at her. " Don't *you* ever try the soft, restraining hand on me. I won't stand it. It is a thing I never have stood with a very good grace. . . . As a matter of fact this effort of yours towards it has made further conversation between us impossible for the moment. It—it—has upset my apple-cart, to put the matter briefly." This quotation of his antagonist's own words Cynthia recognised as the symptom of extremest annoyance.

He jerked the pipe out of his pocket and jabbed his thumb at the ashes in its blackened bowl. With a purely mechanical movement he shook his pockets to make sure of his match-box and stalked out of the room.

He had behaved, now that she came to think of it, exactly as she ought to have expected. Only, lying up there in her room for two weeks, she had come, somehow, to expect other things of him. . . . She was a silly. . . .

In his study Petrie stabbed at the fire, lighted his pipe and sat down before the piano. "They're all the blessed same," he said aloud, "every mortal one of them. There may be variations of course—*slight* variations, mark you, but the theme is always the same. . . . Anyhow, she has no headache, it appears, and no predisposition to one. . . ."

He opened the piano and began to play.

After the first wild torrent of sound his long fingers began gently to caress a melody from the notes—the melody that you could have just barely suspected, alive and beautiful, but hidden away in the chaos of the first bars.

Gradually and very tenderly he laid it bare and set it up alone in its dainty splendour, unveiled and starkly beautiful. He played on to where Cynthia in her copying had deciphered his scrawled 'scherzo.'

His head was now flung back, his eyes closed. His pipe had gone out, and was gently swaying between his teeth. All the twists were gone from his face, and his lips were parted in a dreamy, far-away smile.

Cynthia, up in her bedroom, was likewise smiling. She had opened her door to listen, and sat up in bed, her hands clasped tightly round her ankles, her chin resting on her knees.

She had never before deliberately listened to his playing; and so she marvelled at that power of his which struck her, because she was now for the first time regarding it as something new and wonderful in him. She saw that she was trembling—stirred, not by the fact that he possessed such power, but by the exquisite wonder of the thing itself, the transient magic that brought the smile of tender whimsey to her lips as it brought it to his own. She strained her ears to lose no note of it as gently, and still more gently, he caressed its loveliness.

Listening thus, tense and quivering with the excitement of what was, after all, a tremendous discovery, she heard the slam of the front gate and the crunch of loose gravel on the path. The knocker banged upon the front door as Conrad

flung it open with Mrs Petrie's key, and she heard him and Freda shuffling in the semi-darkness of the hall by the hat-stand.

From Petrie's study came a crash of notes like an explosion, and then the strains of Rule Britannia, in wonderful imitation of the barrel-organ that visited their road on Thursdays. Then, very lugubriously, came the National Anthem, and after it silence, save for the tinkle of the tea things and Mrs Petrie's light footfall on the stairs.

Cynthia just had time to lie down and cover herself up before her mother appeared in the doorway.

"My dear," she said, "in a draught! O Cynthia—I suppose your father left the door open on you."

"No," said Cynthia, "I did. Had a nice walk?"

"I see he's been in," Mrs Petrie said, for she was looking at the ashes scattered on the bedspread by Petrie's departing gesture. "I hope he didn't excite you—that's all. . . ."

"Why on earth should he have excited me?" said Cynthia.

Yet she was excited, as she had never before been excited in all her life. It was not his talk that had done it, nor yet, strictly speaking, the sounds he had made. It was something more than these—and something far less; it was the mere egotism of the artist, the tingling in her brain and hands and fingers that threatened to give her no rest till she herself should be the one to do the thing that Petrie had done, and to make herself perfect in the doing of it. . . .

A landlady often enough decides to hide a stain over a wash-stand with a text from the beatitudes, and her 'guest' will read the thing day after day, or even year after year, and in most cases nothing at all happens to him as a result of it. He leaves the house exactly as he came into it—a normally religious or irreligious man.

That is what happens in most cases, but not in all. In the odd case, upon the odd man there will suddenly burst the 'Light'; and it will burst upon him through the same old soap-stained and tarnished words that for ages have had no particular meaning for him. Given that the man is odd, he will do what even the day before he would have looked upon merely as making an idiot of himself. He will testify; he will

find no rest till he has tried publicly to do unto others as he has been done by in this matter; such is Genius.

It was very much the same kind of thing that had happened to Cynthia. She had heard the same piano played by the same hands for as long as she could remember; she had played it herself for nearly the same length of time; but she heard it in that last twilit half hour as she had never heard it before. The hearing had become all of a sudden peculiarly personal to her. Hearing it, however, was not sufficient for her, just as staring at a text is not sufficient for the Salvationist.

The fever that burnt her was the fever for testimony. . . .

She was devoutly thankful that she had been taught to play. Nothing mechanical stood between her and the great ones who first thought out the sounds that she should make. . . .

She could still hear the lilt of Petrie's melody, fresh as the ripple of water, light and frolicsome as butterflies in spring; but it was too elusive for her as she lay in the darkening room. She could not properly grasp it all, and, think and puzzle over it as she might, she could find no name for it. Then she remembered what Petrie had said about trying to translate it into words. She saw his meaning clearly now. The thing was itself, as he had snapped, and the meaning of that, too, became suddenly clear. . . .

She gave up worrying about a possible name for it, and registered the discovery that her father had been wonderfully right in what he had said; he must indeed be an altogether wonderful man.

. . . . . .

§ 3

On the first morning of Cynthia's return downstairs Mrs Petrie resumed her shawl. Her whole demeanour changed accordingly. Her vitality vanished. It was as though Cynthia and she were seated at opposite ends of a see-saw.

As they sat down to lunch, the mother took the bunch of keys from her belt and handed them slowly across the table. "You will probably be downstairs, dear," she said; "you can rest on the sofa in the drawing-room."

Cynthia had no intention of resting, but she took the keys.

After lunch she waited till she heard Petrie going out through the garden. Then she went into the study with her copy of the Opus Z.

She sat down and looked through the manuscript. She had played right through it once before, when she had first made the copy. She saw the parts of it that would have troubled a number of people—the Chill girls for instance; but they had not bothered her. She had been quite satisfied with the way she had got through it all.

She had not then heard her father play it, and that made all the difference. She realised that she had no more played the thing in that hurried running through it than the average curate acts Hamlet at a reading from Shakespeare.

She saw some bunches of notes and a sudden change of time on the third page that had puzzled her for a short time; but she saw now that it was not there that the real difficulty lay. It lay in the pages that followed, where everything became simpler, where the rough places became smooth. She remembered how she had sat and listened and smiled three days before, and in remembering she smiled again. Of all the mystery and subtleties that Petrie had made for her, the only indications on the pages were a 'Largo,' a 'Scherzo,' an 'Allegro,' a few f's and p's. . . . And these were not much more help to her than a typewriter and a dictionary are to a poet.

She began to play—first somewhere in the middle, at a phrase that she remembered best as she had sat in bed and listened. Then she tried it all through from the beginning. Next, absorbed and tense, she tried it where her father had first leaned back, dreamily smiling. She could not do it as he had done it. Again she tried it, and again; smiling, frowning, pouting, scowling, and again smiling she tried it, and still it would not come.

Back to the beginning again, and through from the beginning to this part that was so hard and so precious. She was getting it now. . . . Soon she would be able to smile as Petrie had smiled. . . .

Then she heard the tinkle of tea-cups. It was nearly five o'clock!

What on earth, she wondered, could have possessed her to 'practise' for three hours? Never in her life had she unconsciously done such a thing before.

In the hall she met Mrs Simpson with a small tea-tray in her hands.

"What is that for, Mrs Simpson?" she asked cheerfully. "No more trays for *me*, thank you! Didn't you know I was going to stay up?"

"Yes, Miss," said Mrs Simpson; "it's for the mistress. She said would you please get on as soon as the children come in. She won't be coming down."

Cynthia's elation from the afternoon's work immediately vanished.

"Oh, very well," she said dully. "I'm going upstairs for a minute, I'll take that up. Here come the children, so you can make ours now, and Mr Petrie's. I'll take it in when I come down."

Ever since the time, nine years before, that the now married Sylvia had become capable of keeping house, Mrs Petrie had enjoyed the freedom of her bed, in such a way that it was recognised and accepted without criticism by the rest of the family. Sometimes it was a headache that kept her in bed, sometimes just 'nerviness,' at others it was a nervous headache.

Cynthia took in the tray.

Her mother had not, technically, gone to bed. She lay upon the bed, but the coverlet had not been removed, and she was covered only with a rug. Her hair was still done up, and her dress was still on, under her dressing-gown. These facts indicated that she would be down to supper.

Cynthia knew that even this had not happened all the time that she had been ill. . . . She wondered immediately how long it would be before she could start going, again, to Melton.

Tea with Freda and Conrad was not a stimulating affair. They had been skating hard on the pond below Wilton's Hill, and they were morose and grim in their taking of nourishment.

The only conversation beyond that necessary to the exchange of bread and butter and muffins and jam was, "How many headaches did mother have while I was ill, Free?" and "None, 's far as I know. Why?"

The ' why ' remained unanswered.

After tea, when the children had gone back to the skating pond, Cynthia went into the drawing-room.

The fire was nearly out, and Cynthia responded with her weariness and dull depression to the chilly drabness of the room.

Everything in it was old and worn; every colour faded. Apart from the set of Dickens that had won and held its place there by the accident of just fitting into a small revolving case, there were no personal belongings in it. It was anyone's room—as impersonal and lacking in any signs of intimacy as the waiting-room of a dentist.

The vases had only once, to Cynthia's knowledge, held flowers. Ever since that occasion, and always before it, they had stood neatly empty upon the mantel-piece and two little tables.

The vases themselves were just odd things that Petrie had picked up in the course of his knocking about, at Budapest, Dresden, Vienna, Antwerp or Moscow. They might have become, under different circumstances, the treasured finds of an eccentric collector, but now they were only *bourgeois* bric-a-brac. It is even doubtful whether their makers had intended them to be vases at all; it is equally uncertain what destiny Petrie had had in view for them when he stuffed them into his luggage; for they now stood, where they were never beheld by the eyes that had first been caught by them, little spots of colour in the dreariness of an unused drawing-room—useless and empty of everything but dust.

On a little inlaid table, from which year by year more pieces of mother-of-pearl sprang out, there stood the silver coffee set he had brought from Prague. Cynthia had never known it to be used; she had never known it to be moved more than was necessary for a duster to be passed under it.

Everything was monumental and static, save for the imperceptible process of decay.

She wondered, as she looked dully at these things, whether in, say, five years' time she would still be bound by idle, empty hours to this room. . . .

Then, hesitating and irresolute, she went into the hall.

She paused by the hatstand, where her music-case hung; she passed on, deciding that it would be better to see first if he were busy. Noticing that it was the first time in her life that she had ever thought of doing so, she went—uncalled, and without a tray of any kind in her hand—to the study, knowing that Petrie was there.

"Busy, father?" she said from the door.

"Even free-lance thinkers," he said without looking up, "are always busy. A thinker who is also a merchant and the scribe of merchants is, at this hour of the day, busy as the devil himself."

He turned to look at her; she was glad only that she did not have the "Opus Z" in her hand; that would have humiliated her. As it was, she was not humiliated; she had merely found what she had expected.

Petrie then looked round at her and smiled. "Feeling better?" he said.

"Oh, yes," said Cynthia, "*I'm* alright again, thanks," and she went out again.

Standing in the hall she perceived that every door was shut to her; she was alone; she fitted nowhere.

Chapter Three

§ 1

IT was very much in this frame of mind, still during her official convalescence, that Cynthia went round one morning to see how George and Sylvia were getting on.

Most of the little houses in Pelchester occupied by couples like George and Sylvia were named 'Fernlea.' It was the 'Fernlea' in Victoria Crescent that they occupied.

When Sylvia had finished dusting the drawing-room mantelpiece she sat down beside Cynthia on the sofa.

Suddenly, and very solemnly, she looked her up and down, and said, "We were saying, the other night after you had been here—George and I—that it is high time you did up your hair, Cynthia."

"I suppose—come to think of it—it is," Cynthia agreed. "But I don't see that George and you need worry your heads about it. . . . Yes, I suppose you're right though. . . . I wonder mother never thought of it, don't you? It's just the sort of thing she would be likely to start worrying about, though *I* don't see anything to get agitated over. . . ."

"It's a great deal to get agitated about," Sylvia said. "There's no reason why anyone should go about looking a freak—unless, of course, you *prefer* to look a freak. . . ."

"Oh, so I look a freak, do I?" Cynthia cast her eyes downwards, in a loyal glance over her long rain-cloak and ankles and heavy shoes.

"Oh, your things are all *right* enough," Sylvia conceded; "it isn't that, my dear. But no one could help looking a freak with the face and figure of a grown-up woman and skirts not quite long enough, and no proper corsets, and hair down. And it isn't as though your hair were not conspicuous, either; and father isn't poor. You might not know it—but there is no reason in the world why you shouldn't dress properly. *I* always managed to dress well enough. You could look as

nice as any girl in the town, you know, Cynthia, if you gave your mind to it a little bit. I could help you at first, to choose things and that . . ."

The discussion might have developed quite amiably if Sylvia had not said 'and that'; but her use of those two words in rounding off most of her phrases had irritated Cynthia for years. If she did not stop to jibe at them in a Conradesque manner, she could take no further part in a conversation. So she said merely, "Oh, no need to worry about *me*."

"I could show you how to do your hair at first," Sylvia went on. "There are heaps of ways in one of those fashion books of mine."

"Thank you," said Cynthia, "some time or other . . ."

But she went one better than that. On the way home she went in to Mr Prout, the "Gentlemen's and Court Hairdresser," in the High Street, and was late for lunch.

Mrs Petrie made no exact comment. She looked at Cynthia's head a moment with her eyebrows raised—not evenly, as in mere surprise, but pulled upwards in the middle above her nose slightly more than at the ends, in an expression of perplexity with a dash of pain.

"I wonder who could have put *that* idea into your head now?" she said.

"Well," said Cynthia, "I suppose it had to be done some time."

"Yes," said Mrs Petrie; then, with a mild sigh, ". . . time enough."

And so the vague excitement that Cynthia had felt walking home from Prout's was knocked, just as vaguely, quite flat.

When she took the tea into the study, and found that Petrie was already there, she wondered first what he would say, then she tried to slip away again before he could say anything at all. But he turned in his chair as she neared the door and stretched out a hand to her. "Bless my soul," he said. "So the flag's hoisted at last. . . . Well, Cynthia, I trust it be not the old black one with the skull and cross-bones, usually favoured by your sex. . . ." She saw no point in the remark, and therein it was the kind of remark she had expected; but just as she touched the handle of the door to

let herself out, Petrie said, "But why so high, Cynthia? It's much too high, my dear girl. You hadn't thought about it enough, you know. And it is a thing that is decided, normally, not much more than once in a life-time, so it is worth considering more carefully. Let's have another look."

He stood up, and she walked across to him. He placed a hand on either side of her head, so that the palms rested cool upon her temples, and the long fingers groped through the coils of hair and pressed upon her scalp.

"H'm," he said very softly; and smiling, ". . . Dolicocephalic." She did not know what he said, but it seemed like a term of endearment, suiting his caress. . . . "Dolicocephalic as a tadpole—like the rest of us Petries. . . . You could never get it to stick up there, you know, Cyn, right up on that prodigious bump. . . . It must come a good deal lower. . . . And make the coil a good deal looser and flatter. . . . I never did care for those compressed fibre effects. . . . Let's see . . ." He took her chin between a finger and thumb, and very gently turned her head so that he saw her in profile. "Yes," he said, "that's it. Lower and a good deal flatter. It upsets your balance sticking out like a handle in that way, and your balance is, after all, the chief thing about you. . . . Try it that way next time, Cyn. . . . *There* . . ." and he pressed the base of her head to indicate the site. Cynthia went out smiling, wondering why he was not oftener in such a mood.

She still had other critics to face on the subject of her hair. The first of these was the carpenter, who always touched his cap to her and got into the railway carriage.

As the train started the following Tuesday she took some pages of the "Opus Z" manuscript out of her case and idly turned them over. Then she looked in the window-pane beside her to see the image of her companion, and to distinguish it from her own and the bleak hedges that swirled by, blotted out at times by a gust of steam from the engine. He sat with his head turned away from her, staring out of his own window. Seeing this, she very slowly turned to study him in the flesh—and the flesh of him was worth the studying. Such breadth of chest and shoulder as his, such cables as those that held his head erect, she had never before seen—or noticed. The shapes

of limb that filled and stretched his garments gave to them a quality of sculpture. His repose was so perfect that only his chest very slightly raised and again lowered his grey flannel shirt. . . . His gaze might have been stupid and vacant, the gaze of a sheep or an ox, but its serenity was colossal. It was something to rest upon, something wherein to repose. . . . She had never seen anyone so perfectly in need of nothing.

Feeling her eyes upon him, he turned uneasily and smiled. The smile was followed by a startled, baffled look. He felt the responsibility of expression, and shuffled his feet upon the gritty floor under the tremendous weight of it. Cynthia saw that there was obviously one thing that ought to have been said, so she hastened to say it. "I've been ill, you know. . . . Nothing very much, just a little chill after that awful night just before Christmas. . . ."

"I'm sorry to hear so, Miss." He was easy again, relieved of the onus. Then suddenly he caught sight of her hair. She surprised him in the act of looking at her neck, with the same puzzled, baffled stare.

He started, tried to look calmly away again, but could not. Pretence was not in him. He stared at her again, and then again away, as a flush—first bright, and then deep as new-baked bricks—crept up under his tan. He set the great cords of his throat dancing as he fumbled, furiously, for words. Then in utter despair of them he smiled.

"Beg pardon, Miss," he stammered at last.

Cynthia put her hand to the back of her head. "Oh—that!" she said. "That's quite alright. . . . I'm quite accustomed to that, I assure you . . ." but she quite absurdly turned up the collar of her coat. "It—it doesn't matter a bit . . ." but she too was blushing.

She turned again to the music in her hand and he to his window.

It struck her in sudden indignation that she must have taken a great deal too much notice of the fellow, that he had been insolent.

Then it occurred to her that she had, as a fact, taken no notice of him whatever. She could see, too, in her glass, that he had very nearly turned his broad back completely upon her in his effort to look unmistakably in another direction. It was

impossible, therefore, to charge him fairly with sauciness. . . . To straighten out the matter completely, and to put their acquaintance on a proper footing, she said, after a few moments of hesitation, "I wonder if you would care to do some little things for us—later on. A few odd things about the house. . . . If you would tell me your name. . . ."

"Thank you kindly, Miss. . . . Name of Wardrup." He touched his cap and smiled at her. Then, "I'll have to trouble you now, Miss." This was his formula as the train came into Bemerton. As a result of it, Cynthia always drew aside her knees to let him pass.

He went off with the sunlight twinkling on the golden down that ended in a sharp, straight line across his still glowing cheek. Once more Cynthia felt the sense of freedom, and of strength and strange repose about him, as he swung past the ticket-collector with the grace of a tiger, his bag of tools slung negligently over his shoulder.

Mr Wibleigh, the old tenor, was the next to criticise. He did so by exclaiming suddenly as he stood behind her with a copy of the "Elijah" in his hand, "Dear me! dear me! . . . Who would have thought it? . . . Well, well, well . . ." and he stood, gazing at the back of her neck with a slow shaking of his head and a far-away smile.

The Chill girls were frankly relieved. They had long wondered why Cynthia had not put up her hair before. They explained it eventually as a fad, and had, accordingly, held their peace.

"But why on earth a fad?" asked Cynthia. "What sort of a fad?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Gertrude with diffidence, ". . . one wouldn't be very much surprised, somehow, to find that you *had* fads. . . ."

The point of this remark Cynthia never saw.

§ 2

This visit to Melton marked the return to the normal in the Petrie household.

Mrs Simpson gave up the longer hours that she had been persuaded to adopt in the emergency of Cynthia's illness, and resumed the old ones of ten to four. Cynthia once more got the breakfast and had a good deal more to do in the house during the mornings.

The afternoons, however, she spent in the study. Her copy of the "Opus Z" was beginning to show signs of erasures, scribbled notes and pencilled alterations.

It was the third page, with its sudden break in the time and change of key, that gave her the most trouble and suffered most from the broken blade of the pocket-knife that she used for scratching out. The scarred old page eventually was taken out completely and a new one put in its place, that showed, clearly and cleanly, her revision of Petrie's messy page.

In two days the fourth page followed it; then the fifth and sixth—and then the last.

Only the first and second now remained; and they, battered, stained and crumpled, were not worth leaving with the neat new ones. So before many weeks were past an entirely new manuscript appeared in Cynthia's music-case, and it bore, instead of the blank space at its head, the word 'Sonata.' Instead of 'C. Petrie' under the blank space, it had no name at all.

She opened her case in the Chills' drawing-room one Tuesday morning, and said casually, "Shall I play you my Sonata?"

"Your *Sonata*?" exclaimed Mary: and Gertrude, "*Your* Sonata?—my dear, you don't mean to say you have *composed* something?"

"Well—y-yes," said Cynthia, "I suppose I really *did* compose it. You see, I—I mean . . ." but they did not wait to hear what she meant. Mary ran to the door and called loudly towards the greenhouse, "Dad! . . . Come and listen. Cynthia's composed a Sonata," and both the girls settled down to staring and to smiling at her.

Cynthia could not yet explain. Her handkerchief, as old Mr Chill came in, was being pressed for the first time between hands damp from her nervousness.

"Dear me, dear me, how very exciting," said old Mr Chill, and sat down upon the sofa, turning upon Cynthia the kind,

impartial smile of extreme short-sightedness. Seeing his smile, Cynthia could only tremble, for she remembered that even her father had referred to Mr Chill as a tolerable musician. (His opinion of him had not, it is true, been a high one; but then, his opinion of Greig was not specially high, and even towards Beethoven he had phases of truculence.)

The vicar, continuing to smile, took off his glasses and closed his eyes—and Cynthia began to play.

She saw the girls sitting tensely forward on their chairs, furiously and chaotically thinking. The fact that they were implicated in such an affair was tremendously exciting for them. It was as though a man about to make an ascent in a balloon had turned out to be a relation.

Cynthia saw their father's smile vary from time to time, but it remained, through all its changes, still a smile. He thought of nothing; he was merely listening.

So Cynthia, too, ceased thinking of things, and began only to listen and to play. . . .

When she saw him very slowly putting on his spectacles once more she was pleased by the movement. It showed that he, too, knew that they were coming to the end; whereas in the "Opus Z" as Petrie had left it the end came upon you like a blow, a disaster. Proudly now, and glowing in the sense of her achievement, she gave him the last whispering chords—chords that she had worked at for weeks, in order to keep flowing through them the melody that Petrie had ruthlessly abandoned—chords that Conrad would have described as Pianississi-most.

Then the girls fell upon her in their excitement; but the vicar very quietly hurried them away, to 'see about lunch.'

When the door had closed behind them, he and Cynthia, as though it were the most natural thing in the world for them to do, very solemnly shook hands.

"Dear me, yes," said Mr Chill. "It is a long way. A long, long way. . . . We contemplate, and meditate, and devote the leisure of a lifetime to it—and *then* where are we? Nowhere; absolutely nowhere but the exact spot from where we started. It is still a mystery, and a mystery it must always remain."

It did not matter what Mr Chill meant. It was delightful to hear the gentleness and the approval of his words, to feel the pats of his cool, bony hand.

He opened the door for her. "You must play to me again, my dear," he said; "and perhaps, as far as it is possible, you would teach this thing to my girls—Gertrude, I think, would do it best—so that I might hear it often; for it is only through knowledge that love can come; *real* love I mean."

As they sat down to the table, Mary, still tremendously excited, said, "But, my dear—how did you manage ever to think of such a thing?"

This was the second chance for which Cynthia was hoping. "Well, as a matter of fact, I didn't—quite. It was my father's first. I mean, he wrote it, but it seemed rather choppy and —and—oh, I don't know *what*—somehow—so I just took it and changed it about a good deal. . . ."

Gertrude and Mary said no more. They visibly withdrew into themselves. (The balloonist had turned out to be a very distant connection—not a proper relation.) But Cynthia did not care.

Mr Chill said, "Yes, indeed, there was a great deal in it to mark you as your father's daughter. A most remarkable character, your father, Miss Cynthia, most remarkable indeed. . . . But do you know, I was just thinking that with very little difficulty you could provide a task for my poor old fingers in it. I mean, it would be very little trouble to you to make a 'cello part for me in your Sonata. I would so enjoy trying to play it with my girls upon my 'cello. . . ."

"I'll try," said Cynthia.

"Please don't think I'm trying to suggest any *improvement*," he hastened to add. "That isn't what I mean at all. But just—well, if you could put it into words of one syllable, so to say, for my poor old fingers, it would be most kind and delightful of you. . . . What do you say, girls?"

The girls said, "Oh, yes." Mary added, "But why not do something specially for us, without your father? I'm sure you ought to be able to."

"Very well," said Cynthia, "I will. At any rate I'll try. . . ." She was thinking that Mr Chill could not possibly

have said more than he had said. He had *heard* it—just as she herself had heard the " Opus Z." Hearing it, he wanted to play it himself, just as she had wanted to make it out of the " Opus Z."

In the train on the way home it struck her how comical had been the way she and old Mr Chill had shaken hands.

She chuckled over this, and was glad Conrad had not witnessed it. Then it occurred to her that out of some bars that she had discarded from the Sonata she could get a theme for Mr Chill's 'cello solo. She would call it ' Melody ' (spelt ' Melodie ').

Chapter Four

§ 1

ON Saturday she had been working in the study for an exasperated hour at the 'Melodie.' She thought she would just be able to run through the Sonata before tea.

The study and the piano would not be available to her again till Monday, and there were one or two things she wanted to make quite sure of before writing out the 'cello part for old Mr Chill. A couple of passages in the accompaniment, too, had to be simplified a little for Mary.

She had noted these things on her copy, so she got up to get it from the hall.

Mrs Petrie, in the kitchen, heard the study door opening. As soon as she heard footsteps actually in the neutral zone of the passage she came to the door. "Cynthia!" she called. "Oh, I'm so glad you've come out a few minutes earlier to-day, dear."

Cynthia leaned against the doorpost and said, "Whatever have you been doing, mother, to make you look so awful?"

"I've just been taking the opportunity, since Mrs Simpson went home early, of going through the things. How do you mean 'awful'?"

"Oh, just simply *awful*," Cynthia repeated. "Tired and miserable, and *so* untidy. And what can you have done to get your hands like that? I've never seen *even Mrs Simpson's* in quite such a state . . ."

"If you *had* seen Mrs Simpson's hands like it a little more often," said Mrs Petrie, "it would not be necessary for me to get *mine* into such a state. I tell you, my dear, as I have often told you before—she is not a woman to be *depended* on. It's small wonder that you have to keep on buying new saucepans all the time. Of course it's the newest one that I find in such an awful state! It's lucky I *did* happen to find it, hidden away under the sink. . . ."

"Most *un*lucky, *I* call it," retorted Cynthia; "she could and, of course, *would* have cleaned it on Monday. I really don't see why you fuss yourself so about these things, mother. Have you finished now, so that you can lie down a few minutes before tea?"

"No, my dear, indeed I have not finished," said Mrs Petrie. "I thought you could help me a little now that you have come—about the cinnamon."

"What's wrong with the cinnamon?" Cynthia asked. "Or is there none? It won't be wanted before Monday in any case, so why do you worry *now*? . . . There's something I want rather particularly to finish now, before tea. . . ." She moved to go.

Mrs Petrie looked at her and sighed. "It's too *much*," she said, shaking her head. "Altogether too much. You can't expect to do it all, my dear. House-keeping is house-keeping, and people who have so much else to do cannot expect and ought not to be expected to keep house. If only *I* were a different kind of woman, now. . . . If I didn't lose my head so, over things. . . ."

"Too much indeed!" said Cynthia; "of course there isn't too much. That sort of thing doesn't worry me like it does you, mother. I just take it as it comes; and you needn't *think* of doing it; there's no reason in the world why you should." Something in her mother's attitude made her wistful in her loneliness, as she stood tired and dishevelled in the dusky kitchen.

"Come along, mother," Cynthia said; "do leave it now and have a little rest. It's very nearly tea-time."

"I can't leave a thing like that," said Mrs Petrie. "It will be on my mind till it's done. That cinnamon . . ."

Those first bars of the 'Melodie' persisted in dodging about in Cynthia. When she left the piano and her pencil, if only for a moment, it seemed that there could be nothing to prevent their getting on to the paper. . . .

"What *can* be the matter with the cinnamon?"

Mrs Petrie shrank a little before Cynthia's impatience. "Don't you stop any longer, dear," said she. "I can manage quite well. It's nearly done."

"But what *is* wrong with the cinnamon?" Cynthia insisted.

"Oh, nothing," said Mrs Petrie. "It's alright, dear; do go along and finish whatever you were doing. It isn't *only* the cinnamon. They're all like it, all the other things. . . . I was just changing the tins they're in. They're all old and kind of rusty, and I didn't know if it was safe to leave them in any longer. It might be like verdigris you know. And it seemed to me that there ought to be some more cinnamon somewhere."

"But," said Cynthia, "what do you *want* cinnamon for at this time of day."

"I don't," said Mrs Petrie; "I only want to put it away. I ordered some myself one day quite lately, when you were gone to Melton. I wondered if you would know where it is. . . . But don't stop now, dear, if you have something you must do. If Mrs Simpson takes things, she must go on taking them, I suppose. . . . Cynthia, don't you think you devote rather more time to your pupils than you need to? I'm sure it can't be good, having so much to do. Sylvia never spent all that time and energy on them."

"Oh, my pupils are not much bother to me," said Cynthia, and continued on her way to get her music-case with the Sonata.

As she got back to the study door, the kitchen door also opened, and Mrs Petrie called, "Cynthia—just before you go, dear—tell me, how do you spell 'cardamom'?"

"C-a-r-d-a-m-o-m," shouted Cynthia from the study.

"Oh, wait a moment," said Mrs Petrie, "till I find the pencil. . . . All right, dear."

Cynthia spelt it out again, slowly (having found the word by this time in Petrie's dictionary, to make quite sure).

"Funny!" said Mrs Petrie. "I had that, but it didn't look at all right."

The fact that she lacked a second instrument caused Cynthia no inconvenience. She whistled the 'cello part, and whistled it very well. She had, some years before, heard a man whistling at a concert, but she had not connected his feat in any way with music. Now, as she whistled, she thought again of this man and the way he had whistled.

The twilight was darkened by leaden clouds, and the only light in the gaunt, untidy room came from the window at her back. The window in front of her, over Petrie's desk, faced the gathering night.

As she neared the end, whistling lustily the notes that she knew would cause Mr Chill to rub his thin old fingers together and say, "Dear me, yes—a lot of practice—one wants a lot of practice," she looked up at this window.

Close against the glass, dimly pale against the shadows of the straggling hedge at his back, was her father's face. His hat-brim covered his eyes; but the triangular patch of light beneath it was cut across by a broad, jolly smile.

Cynthia, too, smiled—and destroyed thereby the instrument with which she made her music. But she was not to be cheated of her ending by such an accident as this. She sang the last bars of the melody—sang right out for Petrie—full, happy and triumphant notes such as she had never sung before. She sang the cadenza that she feared would have to be altered before Mr Chill could tackle it, and sang it with all the joy of seeing a smile on the face of another one who had ears to hear.

She would have hurried away with her manuscript, for it was after tea-time; but in a single bound Petrie had unlatched his door and stood in the doorway, smiling and excited. "Don't go, Cynthia," he said breathlessly. "I say . . . By Jove, you know . . ." but thoughts crowded too heavily upon him. . . .

He quickly lighted his pipe with a shaking hand while Cynthia stood and stared at him.

He blew out a great cloud of smoke, and smiling through it said, "Well—" Then his eyes twinkled at her, and he became composed. "Those, I suppose, who prefer a stronger flavour in the same blend can find it in the 'Opus Z.' . . . Never mind, though, Cynthia; you have got the right end of the stick. Whether you've got hold of the right stick or not is a different matter, but you *have* got hold of the right end of it. That I *will* swear to. . . . And let me tell you another thing—if you haven't got that rarest thing in all the world, a genuine soprano larynx of the very first water, I will eat my hat. Lord!—what couldn't old Sturmer do with a throat

like that? Why, the old dog made Sebasté herself out of material not to be *compared* with you, Cynthia. . . . And now, when La Sebasté sings, tears flow from the very souls of the grocers and hairdressers and money-lenders of all the capitals of Europe and America. . . . And Sebasté has never had a note of real music in her. . . . You *have*. I'm blest if they couldn't do something with you—old Sturmer and Dierzo. . . . Dierzo, who plays a piano as other men smile and sigh and swear; plays it, Cynthia, as though—oh lord, he wasn't a man that fellow, ever; he was always a god or a demon. . . . Damme, Cynthia, we must let them have a try! . . . I *promised* them something, you know—years ago I promised it, and I've never given it to them. . . ."

Then the amazing fellow seized her and kissed her forehead, and crushed her in his arms, and again kissed her. "But what on earth are you thinking of at this hour of the day, creature?" he said. "Begone, and get a man his dish of tea. . . ." He swung her to the door, kissed her again, and thrust her out.

When she returned with the tray he took it as though it were a box of matches from a machine on a railway platform.

For all the glow of excitement and pride such as Cynthia had never felt before he now had only a dull, stony stare and a belated, listless "Thanksverimuch." He did not even bother to repudiate his excitement of a few minutes before, or his boisterous gaiety. If he had seemed embarrassed or even angry, the existence of a new telationship, a change, would have been admitted.

But there was nothing at all to indicate any change. All was exactly as it always had been—the dismal, darkening room around the pale, bony man who stared so that he saw not, and spoke so that there was no more life or meaning in his words than in the squeaking of his shoes, as he rocked himself from his toes to his heels.

And yet, as the afternoon wore on, she could not and would not believe that his embrace meant nothing at all, that the *status quo* remained. The relapse into the old dingy atmosphere that she had found on her return to the study had been as dramatic as the gesture and the breathless word with which

Petrie had first dispelled it, and so it continued to oppress her : the hug and the kiss remained—enigmatic, portentous.

She did not, however, care to see another cold or evasive stare, to hear more icy, meaningless words. So she asked Freda just before seven o'clock to get the tea-tray from the study.

Mrs Petrie found her seated alone before the fire in the drawing-room, and probably mistook her attitude of pre-occupied idleness for one of doubt as to whether the fire was going to catch alight properly ; for she made no comment upon it. She remarked instead that the spices all had new tins and new labels, and that she had transferred the rice from the Mellin's food tin to a glass jar, so that you could tell at a glance how you stood for rice. . . .

Cynthia wondered only how she could stand an evening of interruptions such as this.

" Why not look Sylvia up this evening, mummy ? " she said. " I've got nothing to do till supper ; I could take you round."

" Oh, not on *Saturday*, dear. Another day, perhaps, when it isn't quite so late. I'd sooner make a quiet evening of it to-night. I'll go and lie down for a little while now before getting tidy. Those cupboards have tired me out rather. You could sit and sew or read by my fire, dear, it's a much better one than this. . . . I can't think what made you light it so soon ; it isn't needed till after supper. You could just as well have sat by mine."

" I couldn't," said Cynthia, and stated only the bare truth of the matter ; but the bare truth could not, naturally, be allowed to stand. She added, " I've got some cutting out to do."

The excuse was good and sufficient ; for, whatever might have been the long-forgotten reason that had originally established it, the fact remained established that serious cutting out of any sort was performed nowhere in the house but on the old gate-legged table in the drawing-room, dragged out from against the wall to the hearth-rug.

" Oh, have you, dear ? " said her mother ; " *must* it be *to-night* ? "

With an impatient movement that ran down from her

shoulders to her hands outstretched to the fire, Cynthia said, "What's the difference between to-night and any other night, mother? You said 'not to-night' in just the same silly way about going to Sylvia's."

"Because any other night, my dear," said Mrs Petrie, "I might have been able to *help* you."

"Oh, it's nothing at all," Cynthia reassured her, regretting her peevishness. "I can do it quite easily from that old skirt we let down. It's that stuff the Chills' aunt sent from Liverpool or somewhere."

"Well, don't do anything if you're in doubt," said Mrs Petrie, "it can easily wait till after supper, when I shall be down."

She went upstairs, and Cynthia, resenting the necessity she had imposed upon herself out of sheer politeness, pulled out the table and set up its squeaky flaps, and fetched her work-basket and the roll of material.

These she flung upon the table and sat down again before the fire, to think.

From thinking, she got up again to prepare the supper, impatient that anything—whatever the anything might be—kept on omitting to happen.

She asked Freda to take in Petrie's tray, while she went up to 'tidy her hair and call mother.' The reference to her hair Freda looked upon as a piece of mere, gratuitous snobbery. However, she carried in the tray.

Much could be said of Freda, with her pert truculence, her combination of Mrs Petrie's wistful sensitiveness and Petrie's acid humour. Much also could be said of her prettiness, her blue eyes and flaxen hair and the affairs of her heart which had already begun (during the seventeen days of skating on the pond by Wilton's Hill). But her part in this history is the humble and unobtrusive one of the merely younger sister. She serves only to irritate with the obstructionist turn of her mind, with the 'ways' she picks up at school and with occasional, purely destructive criticism. At times, too, she is there, reluctantly, to fill a breach—to carry in, or bring out, a tray.

She was waiting with Conrad at the supper-table when

Cynthia and Mrs Petrie came down. She jerked her head in the direction of the study and said, "Tea at nine, please, instead of ten. . . . I've told you now, so you can't say I forgot."

Cynthia nodded.

The other three looked at her.

Petrie did not once in a decade vary any habit that affected his contacts with the rest of the family. Cynthia had the only advantage of being prepared for the knowledge that something ought to be about to happen. She did not return the apprehensive looks of any of the other three. Kisses burned again on her brow, and she felt a vague shame of treachery to her mother.

Still looking down, scanning the table-cloth as though to see that all was in order, she said, "Well, let's start," and sat down.

Conrad at length said, "Wonder what's up now!"

The others unanimously resented the remark. Each one felt that it demanded censure, though each knew that precisely that remark was the only possible alternative to silence.

"Don't be such an idiot," said Cynthia; "what is *ever*—'up'? He might be tired, mightn't he, just like anyone else."

"Yes, I suppose so," Conrad admitted, though no one, as a fact, believed in the possibility of any such thing.

They fell to work upon the skirt, pinning, chalking, measuring and cutting. They talked of hems and pleats and plackets and gussets, and whatever else may go towards the architecture of a skirt; and Cynthia welcomed it all, just as men, twenty years later, strained their eyes at a game of nap on the fire-step waiting for the crack of Zero.

The skirt at last cut out and basted and rolled away again into the work-basket, each one of the four looked furtively at the clock.

It showed a quarter to nine.

Each one sat back, silent, till five minutes had gone. Freda was curious, and disgusted with the meagreness of her part in the whole business of life: Mrs Petrie was uneasy and apprehensive, for these emotions had for many years taken the place of frank curiosity and unprejudiced expectancy in

her: Cynthia was wildly excited; she was impatient, striving angrily to stifle the absurd feeling of guilt and treachery, trying hard to convince herself that there was no reason in the world why she should not look them all quite fearlessly and honestly in the face. But she failed.

She wished only that her mother would go to bed, instead of sitting up till long after her usual bed-time, and saying nothing. She wished she could think of just the right word or two to put an end to Freda's absurd curiosity. . . .

"The water's stayed nice and hot to-night," she said at last, "if anyone wants a bath."

No one responded — and another five minutes of silence followed the remark. Then Cynthia slowly stood up and stretched her arms. She pushed back the table and picked up her work-basket. "Well," she drawled "I'd better say good-night, mummy. . . . I expect you'll all be off to bed before long."

"But, my dear," said Mrs Petrie, "*now?* . . . at nine o'clock? Surely you do not propose to go *out* anywhere, do you? You know I'm never asleep before you go by to your room."

Cynthia did know this very well. "Oh, no, I'm not likely to be going out," she said; "but I might be some time talking —in the study."

She made the point of saying good-night, removing one reason for being called into Mrs Petrie's room on her way to bed. She said "Good-night 'Free'; everything is ready for the morning, so there's nothing for anyone to worry about."

She stretched her arms again and walked out as though nothing had either happened or was about to happen; but the fact that she had achieved the mere remark that she would probably be 'some time talking—*in the study*' was itself a happening.

§ 2

Petrie was in the arm-chair on one side of the fireplace. On the other side was his desk-chair, and between them he had

placed a small table for the tea-tray. Upon this table was the cup and saucer from the mantel-piece.

"I'll continue to sit in this chair," said Petrie, waving Cynthia to the other one. "It would be utterly wasted on you. All chairs are alike to a woman."

Cynthia sat down and began to pour out the tea. She could afford to wait without impatience of his banter, for Petrie was obviously as nervous as herself.

"H'm. . . . There are a few things I want to say to you," he said, and stirred his tea uneasily. "Er—at least, what I mean to say is that there are some things which I wish to Heaven there was some one else to say to you. But there isn't, so I must. . . . At least I *think* I must, though I am the last person in the world, as you ought to know, to advocate any tampering with sleeping dogs. . . ."

It was tiresome enough to be talked to like that, but still Cynthia was patient. "Well?" she said, and smiled up at him.

"Well . . ." he echoed, and fumbled in a pocket of his waistcoat. Presently he drew from it a slip of paper with numbered memoranda scribbled upon it. "Yes," he said, staring at the paper. He cleared his throat. ". . . M'yes. Cynthia, you have an ear for music."

Cynthia said nothing. She sat staring at the teacup in her hand, her hopes gone, all her expectations shattered. For four hours she had been expecting something to happen, something unique and tremendous. What it was to have been she did not at all know, except that it was not to be the information that she had an ear for music.

"I remarked," said Petrie rather testily, "that you have an ear for music."

"Well," said Cynthia, dully, "and what of it? Haven't most people, at any rate *millions* of people, got an ear for music."

"They have not," said Petrie. "An ear for music, my dear Cynthia—what *I* call an ear for music, meaning by that the real thing—is as rare among people who play upon instruments and sing—and even among the very best of them, mark you—it is as rare, I say as—as mathematical genius among bank clerks, as the genius of engineering among engine-drivers, as literature among journalists, as the scientific mind among

dispensers. So *there*! Let me repeat to you as a merely historical fact that La Sebasté herself has no more *music* in her than a cow. That is the first thing that I wished to establish firmly between us: that you have an ear for music, and that an ear for music, aforesaid, is an extremely rare commodity."

"Well, I don't see how you expect anyone to understand what you mean by this fancy *ear* of yours," Cynthia remarked a little morosely.

"I don't," said Petrie, amiably; "as a matter of fact, I am not absolutely sure that I understand it myself—not in detail. But I'm clear enough for practical purposes. It is curious, though, the way you find an obstacle to practical discussion in what is, after all, irrelevant to the issue." He paused a moment to sip his tea, and then quite suddenly burst out, "Oh, Cyn! If only your mind was as developed as mine, how we could race along over all this kind of talk. . . . What I meant by 'ear' is something like this: Suppose it were possible to *write things down* in music. . . ."

Cynthia's heart sank. He was 'off again.' She listlessly nodded.

"Suppose," Petrie continued, "that music were the *only* means of writing things down. Suppose, I mean, that you had to keep your accounts and write your washing lists and cheques and receipts and all other purely economic memoranda in music instead of in words. Oh Lord! I don't for a moment imagine you see yet what I am trying to get at; it's just some of my nonsense, . . . eh? . . . But suppose that all the hard, useless, senseless brute facts that fill the newspapers could be recorded through the medium of music and through no other; suppose that instead of learning to read from the symbols of words, people learnt instead to read practical, matter-of-fact meanings from *sound* symbols. Can't you see, then, that though music would have only one value for people in general, as language now has, for you it would have two separate and distinct values? One of them would be the same that it now has for you, since you have, as I say, an ear for music; the second significance and value it would have for you, you would share with Mr and Mrs Simpson and many others;

for through it you would be able to discover from the paper whether that forger fellow was found innocent or guilty yesterday. *Now* do you see ? "

" Yes," said Cynthia, " I suppose so. But what of it ? "

" What *of* it ? " he repeated, staring at her wide-eyed in his amazement. " Do you mean to tell me you are unaware of the results of such a circumstance ? Take a glance, my dear young woman, at the other arts—literature, painting and sculpture. People recognise that there are such arts only dimly, because the purely economic function of them has completely obscured their artistic one. The ease with which you can engage, through the medium of literature, a bedroom in advance, or order a meal ; the ease with which some fewer people can make a note of a railway accident or a prize fight by means of drawing it—the preponderance of this value, I say, has obscured and distorted all vision and corrupted all criticism—and, damme ! there are individuals trying to-day, at so many ha'pence a line, to do exactly the same thing with music. . . . No, my dear Cynthia, you really *must* realise the value of word-symbols and colour-symbols and shape-symbols quite apart from their value as devices for memoranda and book-keeping. You have realised it, thank God, with music —because music, by the merest accident, has no such secondary and economic value. That it is no more than the merest accident that has saved music I am absolutely sure. And what is more, I can prove it. P-r-o-v-e,—*prove* every step of it. It has taken me years to do it, and you can calmly say, ' What of it ? ' . . . Well, I'm hanged ! "

" But you said yourself that it was quite irrelevant." Cynthia was delighted with the inspiration that gave her this retort.

" Yes," said Petrie, with a sudden smile, " and see what they did to Socrates for persistent irrelevance ! However," —and he became meditative, looking again at the paper in his hand—" no, it was not on the agenda, any of it. Engineering is not, as I said, engine-driving, and it is to the driving of our own especial engine that we must return. . . . I think, Cynthia, it would be the most decent thing for me to wait for some suggestion from *you*."

She could see a look of bewilderment and hesitation in his half-closed eyes and about his mouth, a look that destroyed and obliterated the whimsical smile, as suddenly as the smile had replaced his detachment. "I suppose . . ." she began. "Well, you see, I've never thought much about it before."

"Then think, for Heaven's sake, *now*." The words were suddenly wrung from him. They startled Cynthia, and he accompanied them with a bumping of his cup and saucer upon the table. "Think!" he said again; "and think *hard*, Cynthia, as you have never thought before. . . . And do not only think, but act also. Take your life in your own hands—remember that it *is* your own life, yours every bit of it and nobody else's. And act, my dear girl—act like the very devil. . . ."

He stood up, breathing heavily, as though he had arrived suddenly at the top of a staircase. She could not see his face as he turned to select a feather for his pipe from the little bundle beside the clock, but she could guess at its expression from the white-gleaming knuckles of the hand that clutched the mantel-piece. She caught some of his excitement, but having as yet nothing definite to go upon, she could express it only by a weak, awkward smile. He still fumbled among the feathers and she could get no nearer to him.

"Cynthia!" he said suddenly, turning again to her. The entreaty was so solemn, the voice came from such a depth of woebegone sadness, that mysteriously and somewhere very deep within her she was hurt by it. She looked up at him, yearning to be near him, searching to share his burden. "Listen to me," he said slowly. "Listen, for the love of God—before it is too late—to the voice of one crying in the wilderness. . . ."

She was one with him in his excitement. She knew that they were coming, at last, to the very root of things. It was only his words that she failed to understand. But his words did not matter. His appeal remained an appeal, and she answered it as best she could.

She shrugged her shoulders and said, "Well, father, what is it you want me to do?"

"What is it *I* want you to do!" he groaned. "Lord! . . . there it is again, the same old canker. 'What is it *I*

want you. . . .' It is *you* that are to appear in this scene, Cynthia, not *I*." He shook his head dismally over it, and then suddenly brightened. "Listen! If ever one human being succeeded in helping another, I will help you now. If it had been in blue lines ruled near red ones that you felt some elusive lure—in columns of figures denoting pounds, shillings and pence, like that abysmal fool George Tuke; if your delight had lain in Totals and Grand Totals and Carried Forwards, what do you think I would have suggested your doing? . . . Why, in spite of the accident of sex which makes these things unnecessarily difficult for women, I would advise your turning this idiosyncrasy of yours to some account by adapting a profession to it. I would, in short, have urged your studying book-keeping, where you would get your columns and totals and carried forwards, and would get, incidentally, a livelihood out of your joy in them. I would say, 'Go, Cynthia, to London or Llandudno, to Bucharest or Buenos Aires, or wherever the mysteries of book-keeping are best understood and best expounded.' But since it is not in these things that you find delight, but in certain arrangements of certain kinds of noise . . . what then?"

It was Cynthia's knuckles now that whitened as she clenched her hand upon the arm of her chair. "Oh, father," she said quickly, "you—you don't mean Holzgarten, do you? surely you can't. . . ."

Petrie smiled. "So you do remember my having spoken, some time or other, of a place called Holzgarten?"

"Oh, father *dear*!" Cynthia sprang up to her feet and stood close to him. She longed to hug him, to tell him that he was the most wonderful man in the world, the wisest and dearest.

He, meanwhile, had begun to shake his clothes, pocket by pocket, his head bent forward, listening intently to divine the presence of matches. She laid her hand on his arm and said, "I've been wondering ever since tea if that *could* be what you were going to say. It's been simply awful waiting."

"H'm," said Petrie, "so our lengthy digression on æsthetics was superfluous after all. . . . And what, may I ask, have you to say about it?"

Her excitement was checked and stifled, leaving her slightly numbed, feeling a little silly that her hand was still upon his arm. She saw in that moment the secret of Petrie's strangeness: he talked of near and vital things as though they were distant and abstruse; of distant and abstruse things he talked as though they were the things that mattered most, as though his very life depended on them. . . . She had no alternative but slowly to sit down again.

"Well?" asked Petrie; but he asked it with gentleness.

"Well," said Cynthia, "I could never have believed such a thing possible, except in my wildest dreams. My dear, I just ought to be the happiest girl in the whole world. . . ."

"And you are *not* happy," said Petrie slowly, "just because you are afraid."

Slowly he sat down and drew his chair nearer to hers. He took her two hands in his and for a few moments bent his head over them, examining them, turning them over in his own. Then he looked up at her and smiled. So tender was the caress of his strong hands, so gentle the glance of his eyes half closed in the pungent smoke, that Cynthia came near to leaning forward that so she might weep upon his shoulder.

She was weakened and altogether deranged—all at 'sixes and sevens' as she would have put it—by the strain of waiting and of trying to keep pace with his moody reasoning and unreasoning moods, of finding herself suddenly near to him and finding him again suddenly gone. Him she could never successfully shrug away as she shrugged away all the other phenomena that passed her understanding. With him she felt—it seemed now that she had felt it for ages—that there was something she *must* understand, something that she must answer. He beckoned to her, but beckoned only faintly for the weight of some hidden shackles that bound him.

He very gently pressed her two hands and said, "But do not *be* afraid, little daughter, I will try to help you. Look! from the very first I have tried to help. First it was Sylvia . . . and then she married a pair of mutton-chop whiskers with a clerk at the roots of them. Next it was you. . . . Lord, how I did slave to teach you; and then Freda. I must confess I could not tackle young Conrad; I was spent,

pedagogically, by his time. But you three girls I taught to read music while others were teaching you to read the newspaper. It was to spare you the pain and drudgery of doing it when there were other calls upon your time. And I did it all just because there was a ten million to one chance that to one or other of you it might prove to be a—a—medium. There was just that single chance that the thing might come off. For that I ruined my temper and my digestion, so that it took years to repair the damage. . . . Lord! how peevish I used to get. . . . But, Cynthia, Cynthia," and he wrung her hands till she feared she must wince with the pain, " that ten million to one chance has come off—in *you*."

Cynthia could sit up, stiffly composed, no longer. Her memory had sped back to the days when she had looked down upon the front of a white pinafore, her hair in four short plaits that stuck comically out like horns when this infant had gone, hushed, but regularly as clockwork, to the drab and dusty study to climb upon the piano-stool and grope about the keyboard, while the tallest, most cadaverous-looking man in the world growled at her with the deepest voice she had ever heard, and pointed as with the hand of doom (and the longest finger imaginable) at large notes scribbled upon a loose sheet of paper. . . . Sad enough days those, till the dreary, eternally long half-hours had passed and she stole back to her mother in the kitchen or in the bedroom upstairs. . . . And now the same big man sat quietly with her; the deepest voice in the world spoke gentle, dreamy words to her; the hands with the strongest, longest fingers she had ever seen caressed her own. She clasped them and said shakily, " Father, dear—my dear, dear daddy. . . . Fancy your thinking of that all those years ago! You are *wonderful*, simply wonderful. . . ."

But Petrie rose and slowly laid his pipe upon the mantelpiece. " Yes; all those years ago," he said; " . . . fourteen, thirteen, twelve. . . . And to-night, Cynthia, believe me, I have not been idle. To-morrow's Sunday. Everything will be closed; so I went out after tea to the offices, and—and, well, there you are! "

With one swift gesture he emptied the contents of a pocket into Cynthia's lap—a ragged, bulging tobacco-pouch, a large

handkerchief, two bundles of bank-notes and a pair of folding scissors.

Cynthia, in amazement, mechanically separated the personal effects from the property in her lap and made two heaps of them upon her knees.

She stared at the money. Even supposing that the notes were all fives, it was a tremendous sum.

"But, father," she stammered, "I thought we were quite poor; you know—I mean not at all well off."

"And so we are poor," he snapped, "poor as rats—since poverty consists in not spending money. But we've *got* the stuff, Cynthia. It goes on accumulating, you know, just like rust. We are not rich, of course; but money, in this present crisis, is—er—is no object. You see, for nearly fifteen years I have been getting paid five hundred pounds a year, and our standard of living has been far below that of your greengrocer's—about like the plumber's, I should say. So it is in obedience to a purely mechanical law that there is lots more where that little sum came from. Lots, too, elsewhere, I should imagine, since your mother is a great exponent of the 'Rainy Day' school. You, as a housekeeper, know how inexpensive it is to sustain life."

He stopped, and Cynthia continued estimating how much money her lap contained. Even if the notes were only fives, it was at least two hundred pounds, for each packet contained no less than twenty notes. She still struggled with the vaguely overpowering shock of having a large sum of money suddenly flung to her, when Petrie bent down and took his tobacco-pouch and handkerchief and scissors.

"Of these," he said, "I am in daily—nay, hourly—need, and they would be as useless to you as that other stuff is to me."

Then Cynthia looked up at him, trembling, hardly knowing what to say. "Oh, father," she started, "you surely can't mean . . ."

"I can," said Petrie; "and what is more, Cynthia, that is precisely what I *do* mean. It is the only clean way, Cyn—that is why I venture to advocate it. Any other way is slip-shod and morbid and—and morally dirty—septic."

"But, father," and Cynthia stood up and laid the money on the mantel-piece; "father, dear, can't you see . . ."

"I can, and do see *every*thing," he retorted fiercely. "You could go *to-night—now*. In three and a half hours from this moment you could be in London, and the hardest part would be over."

Cynthia was aghast, baffled again and estranged by the extravagance of him and his flourishing gestures. Again she sat down with nothing in the world to say to him.

He too sat down—like a great big boy—at her feet. He placed his arms upon her knees and once more took her two hands in his; caressing their white smoothness he smiled up at her and pleaded. Terribly in earnest he pleaded, softly as some day a lover might plead.

"Believe me, little Cynthia," he said, "it would be the best way—and there is no *easy* way at all. . . ."

Cynthia looked down at him, drawn near by the very intensity of his entreaty.

"Go!" and again he wrung her hands and strained them to him; "and go, my dear, at once. . . . Get out of all this mess of smouldering wreckage that you have always lived in. Leave the weeping woman and the crucified man, before you, too, are broken and dessicated. . . . Leave it all and get among the big illusions and the great illusionists and thier songs and loves and laughter. Be brave, Cynthia—leave the others to their cooking utensils and the dominant kitchens and—and their vinegar. There isn't any help for *them*."

His words held her as they would have held her even had he spoken in Turkish or Chinese. All the old leathery lines had gone from the face turned upward to her, and in their place were the lines—more delicate and elusive—of very present suffering.

Cynthia saw him terribly humbled at her feet, begging as it were a boon.

She smoothed the towsled hair away from the brow. "Funny, dear old daddy," she said; "why is it that you're always trying to make easy things so terribly hard?"

"Don't *coo* at me," said he, and sprang to his feet; "it's

a lie. . . . At least, what does *that* matter? I even things up; I insist merely on a sense of proportion. If I make the easy things a little harder, I make the hard things a great deal easier. . . . Only people will never willingly take the simple way. . . ."

"But there's nothing simple in hurting and frightening people just for nothing . . ." Cynthia suggested soothingly.

"For *nothing*!" exclaimed Petrie; "for nothing! . . . it is just by thinking things are 'nothing' at first that you get robbed and cheated of your very soul! Do you think that the theft and consumption of an immortal soul are completed in a single operation? Indeed not. The process, believe me, is a gradual, insidious thing. You do not know it is happening, unless you are very much on your guard, till it is completed. Then you wake up with a shock to find yourself as innocent of soul as a damp shirt hanging on a clothes-line. And then what happens? . . . Why, then, unless *again* you are very much on your guard, you set to work filling up on somebody else's soul. . . . I do not advocate many kinds of fear, Cynthia, but fear of that one thing—ye Gods! well, I am inclined to be timid of that. Yes, Cynthia, I confess it—positively timid." He laughed bitterly and shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I have said my say. We need proceed no further with the agenda." He took the slip of paper and flung it in the fire. "If *you* do not will to do the thing, there is an end on it. It's *your* will, as I had occasion to remark before. . . ."

Cynthia stooped first to rescue the paper before the flames could curl round to it. Then, "We might need it," she said, smiling, "another day—or night."

"No," said Petrie, with another weary shrug; "never. *Now*—or never. If it is too hard for you now, it can become only harder. You are beaten. Throw that rubbish in the fire, and go to bed."

"Father," she said, "see how hard you're making an easy thing now; and you're making nothing easy. . . . Nothing in the world could make me happier than going to Holzgarten—going, I mean, reasonably and quietly, when arrangements have been properly made and things got ready. . . ."

"Things!" he snorted. "What things? *Holzgarten* is ready, I assure you. Perfectly ready. It *has* been for the last three or four hundred years. . . ."

"There you are!" said Cynthia. "Now isn't that just like Conrad? See how difficult you make it to *explain* anything even. . . . By 'things' I mean myself, and the house and things—there's heaps to be arranged, but it only needs a little *time* to do it. . . . And—and there's mother. I *know* mother will be frightened and upset a little at first. Only you do exaggerate it all so, father. . . . It's all quite simple, I'm *sure*—it's being done every day."

"Yes," Petrie snapped; "so is murder being done every day, but that doesn't make it any easier for *you* and *me* to go out and cut throats, does it? . . . *We* are not doing murder every day. If you were getting away from your mother—every day—it would be different. It would be easy then."

"Yes, and there you go again," said Cynthia. "You always say something of that sort that sounds so wonderfully true, but I know you've cheated in it *some*-where. . . . What has my going to Holzgarten got to do with committing murder?"

"You will soon see," said he quietly. "Before very long you will come to the conclusion that a common or garden murder would be mere child's play with this task of yours. That is, if you persist in wanting to go. . . ."

"Now please don't say that;" Cynthia jerked his arm impatiently; "surely you can see how absurd it is. . . . Don't you *know* how happy you have made me to-night? . . . I never dreamt that such a thing was *possible*. How was I to know that we were so well off—and that you were so—so—Oh, I don't know, daddy—everything is so different after this."

"Meanwhile you leave me standing on the mat, waiting for the second half of an unfinished sentence, the conclusion of a half-expressed thought. . . . You have 'found me to be so'—what? I shall be interested to hear the rest of that."

Cynthia had hoped that he would press for it; hoping, she had not known what she should say. The movements of her fingers upon the lapels of his coat became more hurried; her eyes shifted from his to his chin, to his shoulder, to his feet, and then to the fire. "W—w—well," she stammered; "so—

so sort of kind" (she wanted to say something more, something slightly different, but she left it at 'kind'), "that I was so fond of you . . . and that you were so fond of me, daddy, dear . . ." and Petrie, very slowly said, "What I call sentimental braggadocio, Cynthia, is an appalling vice."

With all the fury proper to a woman scorned Cynthia jerked her hands away from the contact with his coat and planted them firmly on her hips. With her nostrils quivering, she drew herself up and said, "And who started it, I'd like to know, this sentimental whatever you call it? Didn't you first take hold of my hands and mumble over them and very nearly kiss them, or did *I*?"

"Don't be ridiculous," said Petrie. "Kiss your hands indeed! I did no such thing. . . . Or if I did, I shall never do it again in all probability. At any rate, I shall not be drawn into a quarrel over it. Understand *that*, please."

"Phoof!" said Cynthia; "understand fiddle-sticks."

On the mantel-piece beside his elbow she caught sight again of two bundles of bank-notes amounting to at least two hundred pounds sterling. They stood there as a monument to his love of her, his hopes and his consideration.

"Daddy," she said, and again laid her hand upon his shoulder, "we are going to be friends after to-night—you and I—however hard you may try to make it. . . . We will talk—for I never have the chance of talking to anyone. You *will* let us be friends, daddy, won't you? . . . I never have had any friends, you know—not *real* friends."

Petrie was obviously puzzled by the question. He put his pipe in his mouth in order to chew the stem and move it about between his teeth. "I can never make out what you mean, you people, by 'friends,'" he said. "And then you try to explain it by saying '*real*' friends; and that's no good. I've tried often to point out to you—I've tried to point out to everyone with whom I have exchanged half a dozen words—that vehemence and emphasis are not an explanation. . . . You see, ultimately, another person can never *do* anything for you. Friendship, logically, is an impossibility. Wherever and with whomsoever you may happen to be living you have, in the long run, to live deep down and far away—alone. Every

action of yours, you have to perform for yourself. There's no dodging that, old Cynthia. We try to dodge it, but we always fail. . . . For instance, I advise you to get away to-night, to Holzgarten. I *will* the act for you, as far as that is possible; but you omit to perform it. . . . No, Cynthia, the most and the best that one human being can do for another is to sit quite tight, to shut up and to remain perfectly neutral. That much, as a matter of fact, I have always done for you. . . . Look here!"

She watched him take up the bank-notes and carry them to his desk. He emptied upon his blotting-pad the ounce or so of dusty tobacco that still remained in a long tobacco-tin. He stuffed the notes into the emptied tin and put it in the lowest left-hand drawer, that held already a piece of sealing-wax, a couple of candles, a roll of blotting-paper and some odd bits of string.

"This drawer," he said, "is never locked. The money will always be there for you, whenever it should occur to you to want it. I am utterly neutral—I am therefore your friend. I refrain from adding complications to the complexity of another's life—since I am your friend, and . . . Believe me, Cynthia, if you can bring yourself to believe so hard a saying, that greater love than that hath no man—than that he stand decently aside and refrain from thwarting, coercing or cajoling a companion."

He was standing beside her again and she slipped her arm through his. She did it because the new sense of her freedom to do it thrilled her so—to touch his coat or his hands, to feel the wiry strength of his arm between her fingers. "But we will be able to *talk*," she said. "I have always wanted to talk to you, you know, to ask you all sorts of things. . . ."

"M'yes," said Petrie, "people do like to talk. . . . But what can you want to talk to me about?"

"Oh, no end of things," said she; "there's music and *you* and—and *me*. . . ."

"T'cha!" he clicked. "Music forsooth. I have tried to talk to you in the only possible way about music: I *wrote* a little thing and gave it to you, and what did you do? Did you accept it? Devil a bit. You sat down and wrote another

to cap it with. It isn't, of course, so good as mine—not near so good; but it just shows you the old instinct to hasten to cap the other man's yarn before there's been time to laugh *his* out. . . . You see, you don't care a fig for anything I have to say about music."

"You *know* I only did that because yours was so hard," said Cynthia, reassuring him by a squeeze upon his arm.

"Nothing of the sort. It was because it was *me* and what you put in in its place is *you*. That can't be helped. . . . This other thing is just the same. I tell you to go, at once. Do you go? Again, devil a bit. Because it, too, is too hard? . . . So you think. But it is again because one is me and the other is you; and it is inevitable, that gulf. . . . What can I tell you about me that could be of any possible service to you? I could tell you any amount of comical things to amuse and divert you—how my luggage got lost one night in Moscow and I had to play in the head waiter's evening suit, while he, poor man, sat and shivered by the stove in my overcoat."

"Oh, of course I don't mean that kind of thing, silly. I mean what's inside you all the time, making you so funny, and hard and different, and—er, now don't go and get cross about it; but yes, sort of *cruel* is what I mean. Why are you like that, daddy?"

"God bless my soul!" said he, staring at her. "And what, may I ask, makes the snail so harsh and cruel as to draw in his head and his tail—the unmerciful little brute!—at the first sign of some gentle little birdie in search of breakfast?"

"There goes another of the things," Cynthia sniffed, "that seem so grand yet aren't a bit true. . . . Surely you will admit that you *do* frighten people? . . ."

"Apparently!" said he. "Nay—manifestly. Yet they quite willingly indulge in my society till the small hours of the morning, and display the utmost nonchalance in doing so. Great heavens, Cynthia . . . it is one o'clock. You must go to bed. Tell me, have you ever sat up or stood gossiping till this hour before?"

"No," and her glance at the clock gave her a thrill of delight. The hands stood at three minutes to one. "Never. How should I?"

"Not with your sister—before she was taken from us by the stalwart George?"

"Of course not," and she sounded indignant; "whatever for?"

"I don't know," said Petrie. His thoughts were beginning to stray again from the immediate point. "I thought that that was usual. Look here!" and he briskly turned, changing the subject, "we'll exchange signals now and again, if you like. That, I presume, is what you mean by being friends—*real* friends. But you will find that it makes very little difference. We will have to go on, as ever, alone—unless we start breaking the rules and trying to interfere with each other. But remember, that is infernal insolence, to say the very least of it. Who are *you* to presume to think that I stand in need of improvement, and that you are the chosen one to effect it? I won't be interfered with by anyone. You must remember that. . . . You positively *must* go to bed now. . . ."

"And now who's having the infernal insolence to interfere?" said Cynthia, joyfully. "And when, may I ask, do *I* show any signs of interfering with you?"

"*Always*," said Petrie; "every blessed moment you are criticising—criticising, thinking I do not know how to behave myself fairly. You think I talk nonsense, and as soon as you can succeed in getting sufficiently familiar with me, you will actually say, 'I wish you would not talk nonsense.'"

"Of course I'll say no such thing. I'm sure *I* don't care how much nonsense you talk. If you like talking nonsense it is *your* affair, surely."

"Then," said Petrie, "I'm blest if I can see what you hope to get out of this vague 'friendship' scheme of yours."

"Oh, you can see right enough," Cynthia said, and said it a little sadly, having become suddenly thoughtful. "I only want to be a little bit happier, that's all. You see, father, everything is a little bit dull without anyone to talk to. . . . I say, daddy, don't you think *you* could manage to be a little bit happier, too?"

Petrie weighed his answer before giving it. "N-no . . . I doubt it. You see, Cynthia, I have found a *modus vivendi*, and that is about as much as anyone can hope to achieve.

Any change *now* might involve complications of some sort. What is commonly called sentiment is highly productive of complications, as a rule. That is why I do not hold out much hope of happiness to you out of a personal alliance of any kind — since personal alliances are based usually on sentiment. . . ."

"I said I didn't mind your talking nonsense as much as you like, and I stick to it," said Cynthia. "But I must say I don't see where Sentiment comes in if we just sit and talk a little over our cup of tea in the evenings. I'm sure I shall be happier for it—finding things out. As for you, my dear, you just needn't pretend you're not fond of talking. I know better than that, so it can't possibly do *you* any harm."

"Indeed it can," said Petrie, and yawned. "It is doing harm now. You have stayed up till one o'clock."

"Still one o'clock?" Cynthia's heart had grown very light in companionship—present and in prospect.

"Getting on for two now," said Petrie. "So off you go."

"Still that inevitable tendency to bully, coerce and cajole. . . . Same old insolence," she mocked.

"Don't talk to me in that way of coercing and cajoling; what I said is gospel, solemn truth," he said. "In that drawer there I have placed three hundred pounds. The drawer is open. You are therefore as free as the sunshine and the air. *Free*, Cynthia, free, I say. There. . . . Can you grasp that?"

She could not.

The thought, put in that way, amazed her, startled her; but it did not just then linger. It was altogether too big a thing.

"All right," she said dreamily, and yawned upon his shoulder. "Yes, I'll go to bed. Good-night, my old daddy."

She did not, however, move.

After a few moments, which Cynthia spent in smiling into the fire, and Petrie in gazing down upon the top of her head, he cleared his throat and said, "H'm, yes. . . . Good-night, Cynthia. . . ."

Still neither one moved, and Petrie again said, "Yes, indeed it *is* late. . . . Off you go now."

Very calmly Cynthia stifled another yawn and said, "I'm waiting . . . for my daddy to kiss me good-night."

"Don't be a fool," said Petrie.

"Not at all," said Cynthia. "I don't at all mind waiting. I am ever so comfortable. I believe I could actually go to sleep standing here. I can wait. . . ."

"*Don't* be a *fool*!" he snapped again.

"And *that*," said Cynthia, "in spite of all my efforts to point out to you that vehemence and emphasis are never an expla . . ." But she was able to say no more than half the word. Petrie had jerked his arm around her shoulders and kissed her smiling lips.

"And now get *out*," he said; and out she went, ready to cope with the big idea.

"Freedom! . . . Free as the sunshine and the air! . . ." Words had a great significance when it was Petrie that spoke them. . . .

It was a huge idea, the most tremendous and thrilling that she had ever tried to grapple with.

She stood a moment outside the study door in the darkened hall, her heart and head a tumult in the soundless house.

. . . The twisting, cobbled ways of dream-built Holzgarten twinkled again to her in the sunlight; Petrie's words came back, and again she saw the flash of fire that kindled in his eyes as he spoke of the great illusionists with their dreams, their laughter and their loves. But it was 'Freedom'—the stupendous, formless idea that dominated all these for Cynthia. This it was that made the tumult in her.

She went very quietly upstairs. As she passed her mother's door the tumult was stilled.

The door was shut. Mrs Petrie did not call to Cynthia; but Cynthia heard her move.

She was awake.

Cynthia ought, no doubt, to have gone in to her and said, quite simply, "Mother, I am going to Holzgarten, to study music."

But she did not go. Some time, and soon, she would have to say it. . . . She knew that. But she went very softly past the door, and to bed.

As she got into bed she wondered if, even now, she ought not perhaps to go into her mother's bedroom and tell her—tell her triumphantly and full of enthusiasm of the grand scheme. . . .

But she was undressed and the night was bitterly cold. She would be at a disadvantage, undressed and shivering—she could not hope, with chattering teeth, to float her mother on a flood of enthusiasm. If she went now she could only hope to go lugubriously, solemnly—showing that she was well aware of all the obstacles of detail that existed, even though these obstacles could all be overcome; she could go in and discuss the arrangements that would have to be made . . . but this did not seem so good a way of approaching the subject as the other. . . .

Still, she felt rather a fool for having passed the door on tiptoe instead of going in; it showed that there was at least a grain of truth in Petrie's wild words. . . .

Then suddenly she found some comfort. She was not a fool. She was perfectly right; for what would be the use of making a fuss while she was still incapable of going? And how could she be capable of going till she could speak and understand a little German? Her father would teach her German. She would ask him the very next day.

Again she was in a tumult. . . . The cobbled ways. . . . Sunshine. . . . Freedom!

Chapter Five

§ 1

PETRIE was too busy, he said, to start upon the German lessons for a fortnight. So Cynthia had time to consider the adventure before her in all its aspects. She considered it coldly, and she considered it with pulses that throbbed in the excitement and the glamour of it; and always she was able to see how thoroughly right she had been in her decision to postpone taking her mother into her confidence till there should be more obvious sense in doing so.

Time enough to talk about the thing when she knew some German—or, at any rate, not before she had at least begun to learn it.

Then, one evening when she took in the ten o'clock tea, Petrie carefully put together a heap of papers and laid them in a drawer. With a flourish of finality he locked the drawer and said, "There! Finished! We'll begin having a go at the Deutsch now, Cyn, as soon as you like. Nine to ten in the evening's the only time I can manage."

She tried not to show him how childishly she looked upon this as a vital thing, and said casually, "Oh, good. . . . I've been wondering about ordering a grammar book. . . ."

Petrie writhed. "Grammar book!" he exclaimed. "Lord preserve us! You don't want a grammar book with a man who *knows* a language, Cynthia—as a language. Nobody thinks of learning to wrestle by studying skeletons. . . . Oh no. I've got all the books we shall require, up there." He pointed to a stack of dusty newspapers and some old books in a corner of his bookcase. She accepted this remark of his as one accepts a mystery.

She saw, too, that her story was very definitely carried a step further, and there was no inducement whatever to argue with Petrie on a point of detail. She remembered that he had once been paid for teaching people German, and she gained confidence from the reflection.

Petrie yawned and said, " Better leave it till Monday now. There's always some satisfaction in starting things on Monday. . . ."

Cynthia went to bed, trying to realise that she was now within three days of the beginning of her adventure; and she wondered why her mother had not so much as referred to the occasions on which she had come late to bed in that fortnight, after talking to Petrie about Holzgarten. She wondered how much Mrs Petrie had guessed . . . there was nothing to show that she had not guessed it all, and accepted it all without a comment.

For nearly two days Cynthia speculated with this attractive idea, and on Sunday she said, " Mother, you're beginning to look ever so much better, you know."

Mrs Petrie admitted that she felt better.

" Yes, but you must *stay* better, mother," said Cynthia. " You must, in fact, get *quite well*." She tried to get all the emphasis and innuendo possible into the words, but Mrs Petrie offered no challenge, no encouragement.

" Oh, *I'm* well enough now, my dear," she said. " Don't bother about me. The weather is so much better—drier. It agrees with me when it's dry. But *you*, my dear. . . . It's you I'm anxious about. . . ."

" Because I am up a little bit late at nights, I suppose," said Cynthia. " Well, I shouldn't worry about *that*, mother. I've got a great deal to do just now, as a matter of fact."

" So it would seem," said Mrs Petrie. " I wish I could understand *why*. . . . Unless, of course, it is that you intend becoming a musician."

" Becoming a musician ! " Cynthia exclaimed; then paused. She decided in the pause to give her mother another chance. " Well," she added, " I've been rather fancying, as a matter of fact, that I *am* already somewhat of a musician."

" Yes, I know, my dear," said Mrs Petrie, " but I meant a *professional* musician."

" But surely I *am* a professional musician," Cynthia insisted; " I teach and accompany, don't I—and get paid for it ? "

So Mrs Petrie had guessed nothing at all.

This, as opportunities go, was not a propitious one for telling her the things that she had not guessed.

There came from Cynthia the inevitable shrug. "Well," she said, "it's no good worrying. To-morrow I'm going to begin *really* working. Nine till ten every night."

"But why must you work in the *night*?" asked Mrs Petrie.

"Because father's busy at every other time," said Cynthia.

Mrs Petrie said no more. The fact that the work was to be carried on in the study left her nothing more to say. This communicated itself quite clearly to Cynthia.

. . . . . .

She had, however, given a broad and unmistakable hint.

It ought to be clear to anyone, she thought, that there was a good deal more behind such a hint. . . . Her mother would now have a better chance of guessing the state of affairs for herself, of accepting facts quietly.

§ 2

A few days later Cynthia sat in the train, coming home from Melton. Wardrup was in his corner, dozing.

The day's events (namely, a proposal of marriage and the refusal of it) had given her cause to think, and she was, accordingly, seated forward, her chin in her hand, thinking.

She had a simple statement of a simple fact to make to her mother, and she had not, so far, made it.

She was going abroad to study music.

That was the simple fact. "Mother, I'm going abroad to study music properly . . ." that was all she needed to say, and almost any day in the last four weeks there had been nothing in the world to prevent her saying it. Yet she had not said it. Why? She simply did not know.

. . . It was silly—utterly weak. She would put it off no longer. 'Things' could conspire only to make it less easy.

She turned suddenly to the carpenter and said, "I'm going away, you know. . . ."

He jerked up his nodding head with a start, then said, with perfect composure, "Are you now, Miss. I hope it's nice

parts you be going to, I'm sure." Only his instinctive courtesy prevented his again immediately drowsing.

His calm acceptance of the information reassured Cynthia. He, a perfectly unbiassed judge, saw nothing in the proposition to grow excited or furtive over; and he did not even know how great were the allurements offered by it.

Of course, she was merely exaggerating it all to herself; even the Chills seemed surprised that the mother did not as yet know . . . weak . . . utterly *silly* . . . she would tell her, quite quietly, that very night.

But when she got home she found that her mother was in bed, resting, with a headache. She did not come down to supper. She had been in the morning to see Sylvia, and the heat (she had not been dressed suitably for heat) had upset her. Cynthia took her up some arrowroot and dry toast, and saw that their discussion must again be postponed.

At nine o'clock she went to the study.

"I say, father . . ." she began; but Petrie stopped her with a wave of his hand, and said "So?" as a German word.

"Oh, in a minute!" Cynthia said, "only I want to *say* something to you first. You know old Mr Wibleigh? . . ."

Petrie insisted on the observance of their rule. "Herr Vibli," he said, "Herr Vibli von Melton? Ja gewiss," and he nodded.

"Oh, very well," said Cynthia, and sat down. "Well—I mean wohl . . . Herr Vibli hat—heute hat gesacht—das verde ich ihr—I mean seine—frau bekommen."

"So?" said Petrie solemnly, "und du? . . ."

"*Ich!*" said Cynthia proudly. "Ich habe gesacht danke, nein—garnicht."

"And I should jolly well say so," exclaimed Petrie, forgetting the rule. "The miserable old scamp! Infernal impudence of the fellow! Thinks it's time to provide something for himself to collapse upon, now that the collapse is fast approaching. . . . Something with which to fill in his vacuous moments. . . . The voluptuous, unscrupulous old dog! Marry him! he must be sixty-five! Suggested *buying* you, *I'll* bet. . . ."

"Well, yes," said Cynthia; "I suppose you could call it that. . . . One would think I was something to eat. . . ."

"*Everyone* is something to eat," Petrie said testily, "provided one consents to be eaten. Only some are more digestible, more tasty and sustaining than others. Bah! these cannibals. You look out for these wolves that want to marry you, Cynthia. They're almost as poisonous . . ."

"And that," Cynthia interrupted, "is what you were going to say about 'sex,' I suppose. It was written on that paper, you know, that you threw in the fire, that first night . . ."

"Yes," said Petrie, "or words to that effect. . . . The only harmless people, Cynthia, are the ones that don't insist on your spending your life within earshot of them. 'Bekommen' by the way, does not mean 'to become'!"

"Oh, doesn't it?" said Cynthia. "I do think men are very funny though."

"*Men* are not funny," Petrie corrected her. "The joke that's been played on them is humorous enough, but they are only the victims of it. They, personally, get very little out of this great joke of sex. . . . I'm glad, however, that you sent that old idiot about his business. And so we will return to the Tower of Babel."

He opened a book.

. . . . . .

§ 3

The next morning passed as most mornings passed—with the things to be seen to in the kitchen, the bedrooms, the shopping, and the score of odd tasks that ended abruptly with lunch. It was a half-holiday for the children, and so the meal was a more leisurely affair than on other days. It was no better an opportunity for opening her subject than a great many that had preceded it. But the jar given by old Mr Wibleigh's stammered proposal of the day before to circumstances seemingly static still urged Cynthia forward. She realised that no opportunity was likely to be any better.

This one had, as a matter of fact, decided strategic points. The presence of Freda and Conrad would, for one thing, impose certain rules of conduct on Mrs Petrie; and this was decidedly in Cynthia's favour. Secondly, the necessity for food

would keep them all bound to the spot for a definite period; and lastly, a line of retreat was open to Cynthia herself, whither none could follow her; for, the moment that the pudding-dish was handed back to Mrs Simpson, she could say just whatever came into her head about 'practising' and disappear forthwith into the study. . . .

The commencement of the meal led to the discovery by Mrs Petrie that another plate had been cracked by being placed in too hot an oven. Conrad drew air very noisily into his mouth and suggested that Mrs Simpson (or whoever had tried to make the soup) had apparently allowed some of it to get into the pepper.

Freda remarked that some girl's father had died on Monday, and that some other girl was sure it was due to drink. . . .

Cynthia realised that nothing under the sun could lead naturally up to her subject. It would have to be thrust boldly and brutally forward.

"Mother," she said, "whatever possessed you to get so alarmed the other day about my studying music?"

"I wasn't alarmed, my dear," said Mrs Petrie, becoming uncomfortable; "you will do just exactly as you please. I realise *that*."

"Well, at any rate, you weren't exactly overjoyed about it. But it isn't as though it was any new-fangled idea. I've always known something about it, haven't I?"

"Yes, exactly," said Mrs Petrie; "that is precisely why I may have shown some little surprise. You do know a great deal about it. You already know far more, I should think, than Sylvia ever did, and she found it quite sufficient for *her* needs. . . . Unless, of course, you propose taking it up *professionally*. . . ."

Cynthia squirmed at the way she said that particular word. They had, however, come to the point at last. "And why shouldn't I think of taking it up—*professionally*?" she asked quietly.

Conrad clicked his thumb-nails together, and said, "Good old Beethoven!"

"Idiot!" said Cynthia, but made the mistake of smiling at him.

" Vociferous applause," said he, bowing over his soup.

" Oh, *do* shut up, boy," said Cynthia. " I rather want to *get* at this, mother. . . . And *is* there any reason why I should not take it up professionally ? "

" And is there any reason why you should, dear ? " said Mrs Petrie, doggedly. Cynthia merely grunted, refusing to grant this retort the status of an answer. Mrs Petrie added, " *Sylvia* didn't seem to find it necessary, did she, my dear ? And she strikes me now as very happy, I'm sure."

Cynthia suggested, " Perhaps Sylvia never *wanted* to be a musician ; there's no knowing. I must say I can't see very much against one's being a musician. Why, mother, you were studying to be one, yourself, you know ; and girls didn't do half the things then that they do now."

" No," said Mrs Petrie, with great significance, " they certainly did not."

The irrelevance of this, and the general effect upon the listeners of Mrs Petrie's having scored, dislocated the discussion for a few moments.

Mrs Simpson came in and placed the rib of pork before Cynthia, and she began to carve.

When everyone but herself was served, Cynthia said, " I expect the fact of the matter is that you're afraid I might make a mess of it—fail."

" I had never thought about it one way or the other." And Mrs Petrie's tone implied that thinking about it even now was rather a waste of time. " Such a thing would never occur to me."

" But, my dear mother," said Cynthia, " why ever not ? I should have thought that it would be the most natural thing in the world to occur to you. My parents are both musicians, and Sylvia and I were taught to play before we could walk, almost. . . . At any rate, *I* was, so I don't at all see why it should surprise you. It seems to me the most natural . . ."

" It is not natural for *any* girl to be alone in the world."

" But *you* were," said Cynthia.

" That was different," said Mrs Petrie. " *My* parents expressly wished it. They *wanted* me to study music. It was, at any rate, a mistake—but it was *their* mistake."

"Oh," said Cynthia, "so parents *can* make mistakes, then —sometimes."

"Yes," said Mrs Petrie, turning defeat to partial victory by a heavily enigmatic tone; "everyone can make mistakes, sometimes."

Cynthia saw that every innuendo of her mother's suggested a side issue, upon which it would be the easiest thing in the world to digress; but she was not to be diverted. The discussion, too, the actual saying of things, was turning out far easier than she had expected.

"I suppose," she said, "that you had thought of *some*thing for me, mother. . . . now that I'm more or less grown up."

The atmosphere had grown too heavy for Conrad to use the opening that this remark presented to him. He glanced at Freda, but Freda, too, perceived that gravity was to prevail.

"And what is there to think of?" asked the mother. "You have, as you say, grown up, Cynthia. That in itself is enough for the present, surely. . . . Look at Sylvia; it was not necessary to *think* of anything for her, once she had grown up. . . ."

Cynthia knew exactly what she had to say now; she had, in fact, known it for weeks. Once again she was surprised to find that the saying of it seemed to present so little difficulty. "I suppose," she said, "that you mean we could just wait for some one to marry me!"

It was impossible for her to hide the disdain she felt. Freda and Conrad were now very thoroughly attentive. Mrs Petrie noted this and became more uncomfortable. The subject struck her as indecent, but there was no possible retreat (the suet pudding had not yet even appeared).

"Well," she said evasively, "I'm sure I don't see why we should worry ourselves. You are still very young to think of these things, my dear."

Thus, by sheer accident, Cynthia found the handle of a weapon offering itself to her. She smiled, and took it.

"I rise to announce," she said, with Conradesque solemnity, "that I received a very good offer of marriage when I was about twenty-two hours younger than I am at this moment."

Conrad stated himself to be jiggered.

The explosive sound from Freda stated nothing so exact; while Mrs Petrie stared at Cynthia and said, "Cynthia! how —how *can* you?"

"As a matter of fact," she replied, with perfect composure, "I couldn't; and didn't. . . . Come on, Boyo . . ." and she gave Conrad a baked potato, richly browned after his own heart. "But it was a good offer all the same. . . . Money: not a fortune, of course, but quite enough for comfort without luxury and ostentation; and a very good chance of being left a widow of independent means at an early age. . . ."

"Cynthia," said Mrs Petrie, looking apprehensively at the astounded Freda, "this is no joke. It is irreverent and coarse to jest upon such a subject."

"But no one is jesting," said Cynthia, "it's perfectly *true*."

"Then your attitude just proves," said Mrs Petrie, "how much too young you are to think and speak of these things at all. And since this thing should have happened on your one day in the week away from home, you ought to be able to see the kind of thing that music as a profession would expose you to *every* day. . . ."

"You mean marriage?" Cynthia asked sweetly. "But it is not their professions or their educations that expose women to marriage—it is their sex, mother, don't you think?"

She wished that Petrie could have heard her saying that. Mrs Petrie flashed a quick glance at the door which communicated through the hall with the study; then she looked down again at her plate.

"Of course I shall tell you all about it later on, mother," Cynthia said; "but it's all over and done with. I do wish you would explain now why you don't want me to take up music."

Mrs Petrie could scarcely sit still. She hated being cornered on such a subject, and she hated the presence of the children.

"I don't see why there should be all this bother," she said, still seeking escape. "I don't see why you cannot wait a little. . . ."

"Oh yes," said Cynthia, "for 'Mr Right' to come along, I suppose. I'm sure that's what you mean, though you won't say it. . . . Of course, I admit I might fail in music, mother.

But then, mightn't I fail in *marriage* just the same ? Heaps of people do, you know."

This was another remark that she would have liked Petrie to hear.

Mrs Petrie's lip quivered ; the pallid eyelids drooped and flickered over her eyes. " You have acquired a very strange manner of speaking, my dear," she said coldly, " from—from *some*where."

" I'm sorry, mummy," said Cynthia ; " only it does seem to me high time that we began to think of this. Freda is growing up, you see." The effect of this tactical fluke was instantaneous. Freda came over the border-line of neutrality into open alliance. Cynthia followed it up ; " Freda will finish with school *very* soon now, and I can be free to—to——"

" To *what* ? " asked Mrs Petrie, *de profundis*.

" Well—" Cynthia hesitated, " to do whatever's best. I mean, Freda's being at home would make me sort of superfluous in the house."

Now she was beginning to find the talk a little less easy.

" And do you think, my dear," said Mrs Petrie, looking at her very closely, " that a daughter is ever superfluous—to her mother ? "

There, Cynthia saw, was the whole matter in a nutshell. And she had not the heart to crack the nut at a single stroke. . . .

" I don't mean *superfluous* exactly," she said, fidgeting ; " I mean I could be spared much more easily—to—to study, and—and all that sort of thing. . . ."

Mrs Simpson now came in with the pudding. Mrs Petrie astonished her children by getting up and going slowly, and perfectly silent, upstairs.

Cynthia had suspected not even the possibility of her doing this. She had timed things on her assumption of the stability of rites ; so she now collapsed, overpowered by a general sense of the futility of everything.

The really big thing—the only *practical* thing, in fact, that needed just a little thought and working out in detail—had not even been mentioned between them. After a few pointless generalities and irrelevances her mother had simply gone

out of reach—gone, too, without her pudding. If she behaved thus over matters of fancy, what was to be expected when they came to matters of fact ? . . . Cynthia thought bitterly of her father's suggestion that she should steal away like a thief at the dead of night; of his melodramatic gestures. She wondered how it came about that there was always good sound truth in the things he said, however wildly and extravagantly he might say them. . . . And she knew exactly what was likely to follow such a scene.

Freda and Conrad also knew, and Conrad had brought home a word for it, a word which became devoted to this particular thing and used for no other. The word was 'acrimony.' It had acquired a special and individual significance over and above its ordinary literary meaning. It stood as the brief but exact symbol for the silences and inaudible sighs and reluctant footsteps of Mrs Petrie hurt and apprehensive; it stood for Cynthia's impatience and irritability and for the deft and hurried movements with which she helped to express them; it stood for Mrs Simpson's grim neutrality in such matters; for Freda's petulance and for Conrad's own attitude in the circumstances—a slightly supercilious one vaguely resembling that of a bored master of ceremonies. . . . It was, in short, the one word of the language that denoted all the outward and visible signs of discord, when discord prevailed in the Petrie household.

A period, then, of 'acrimony' had unmistakably set in. . . .

"When you've done *reading* the pudding, sister mine," Conrad said languidly, thrusting his plate towards Cynthia, "you might bowl us another over of it. Eh, Freda ? . . . Not so dusty to-day. . . ."

Freda said, "You don't mean to let me in for *all* the work when term finishes, do you, Cynthia ?"

"Not this term," said Cynthia, quietly. "And, at any rate, there's heaps of time yet before we need to start bothering about *that*."

"There didn't seem to be much time to spare a minute or two ago !"

But Cynthia was not to be drawn.

. . . . . .

§ 4

Since nothing but food and foot-gear passed from the rest of the household to the study, the acrimony remained outside it.

And there the stifling atmosphere of acrimony was breathed for three whole weeks, till Cynthia became determined at all costs to clear it.

For those three oppressive weeks no one had striven after greater brightness than monosyllables.

Mrs Petrie and the children were already seated at supper when she got home from Melton.

" Good *gracious* ! " she said, " I *am* glad." Even this amount of vivacity seemed to startle them.

" I shan't even wait to wash my hands," she continued, and sat down. " I don't know when I've felt so hungry ! "

" You're looking quite flushed," said Mrs Petrie.

" I shouldn't be surprised at all," said Cynthia, without any of the defensiveness that usually followed such charges. " I'm tired, too—*dreadfully*."

" An egg beaten up in milk," said Mrs Petrie, " is just what you need." She obviously expected very little to come of the suggestion ; nothing did.

" I *have* had such an exciting day," said Cynthia ; " I want to talk it over with you, mother—afterwards."

Freda and Conrad acknowledged the insult offered them by a raising of eyebrows and wrinkling up of noses.

" Cheer up, babies," said Cynthia, seeing the acknowledgment, " you'll hear all about it soon enough. It's nothing very much—only I just want to talk it over with mother first."

She was setting out consciously, and with all the cheerful tact she possessed, to end the loathsome state of glumness on the part of them all. Her mother saw it and responded.

" Why, of course, dear," she said ; " to whom else ought you to talk about these things, but me ? "

She was, nevertheless, uneasy ; and the ball, for all Cynthia's cheerful small talk, was just barely kept rolling.

Freda was resentfully confident that not another word would be heard of the thing till the engagement was actually announced.

Conrad had long been fairly certain that at least half of life is perfect nonsense, and Cynthia's banter only served to confirm this view.

"Clear away like a dear," she said to Freda, when they had finished. "We'll go into the drawing-room, mother."

"Oh, do cheer up, mummy," she said, as the door closed upon them, "you'll make me feel I've done something perfectly terrible, when it is the most usual thing in the world. . . . They are such dears, you know. They've asked me to—to—to—I mean they've persuaded me to spend a fortnight with them. The vicar . . ." she stopped and looked at Mrs Petrie.

She was sitting perfectly silent and still, staring coldly in front of her. "So *that*," she said slowly, "is what you wished to say to me?"

Then Cynthia laughed. "Good gracious! . . . I suppose it's that absurd Mr Wibleigh business you thought I was going to talk about. Why—I had almost forgotten about the thing. . . ."

But two tears had by this time run down Mrs Petrie's pale cheeks. "So *this*," she said bitterly, "is the way you have chosen to punish me. I *see*."

"*Mother*," said Cynthia, "I can't think what on earth possesses you sometimes, to talk the way you do. How does it punish you, or anyone else, for me to go away for a few days, to visit friends? Doesn't everyone in the world do it—except *us*; because we, of course, never do anything that other people do. . . ."

"I know, my dear; that is all perfectly true. But anyone can see why it should come just *now*—after the last few days. It is very unkind of you, Cynthia. There is quite sufficient sadness in the house without *our* becoming estranged, so that we should seek opportunities like this of retaliation. . . ."

"But who *is* estranged?" Cynthia thrust in; "what retaliation?"

"*This*," said Mrs Petrie doggedly. "If you were *happy*

at home, my dear, you would not seize upon the first opportunity of going away from it."

"What nonsense," said Cynthia. "I haven't seized anything at all. They *asked* me, I tell you, mother—they've asked me heaps of times. *They're* not an unhappy family, yet *they* always go away from their father to aunts or something in Birmingham or somewhere, while he goes fishing in Devonshire. *They're* not estranged by it, I'm sure; so why on earth should we be?"

Mrs Petrie only said, "Why indeed *should* we?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Cynthia; "I wish I did—unless, of course, it's because you're annoyed with me for spending a whole hour every day in the study. . . ."

"*My dear*," said Mrs Petrie, and sat up very straight in her chair, "that is a thing that you must never say. It is the most cruel thing in the world for children to be torn between their parents." Very sadly she added, "It is always the children that pay."

The fact that Cynthia had read this in some book or other hardened her, so she only grunted.

"How was I to know anything about this?" Mrs Petrie continued; "you never told me your friends had asked you before. . . ."

"What would have been the good? Only *now*, when you seemed to be keeping so much better, and Freda is older and more responsible, I couldn't see any harm in suggesting it. The change will do me good."

"You did not tell me that you were not well," said Mrs Petrie; "though I have *thought* it myself."

"Oh, of course, I am perfectly well," said Cynthia wearily, "and you know it, mother. But the change will do me good all the same. Well?"

Mrs Petrie shrugged her shoulders. "What is it you want me to say, dear?" she asked. "I really cannot see why you should bother to mention it to me at all. You seem to have made up your mind."

Cynthia calmly lied. "Because, of course, I thought you would be so delighted at the idea of my having such a pleasant holiday with my friends; because I knew that you had been

worrying about my working so hard, and because I know that you would just love the Chills yourself if you knew them. Only one hates to ask anyone to come here, you make such a fuss about the tea and things, and make everyone feel perfectly awful the way you try to palm off the dry bits of cake and the thick pieces of bread and butter and things on the family. And also, mother, if you *really* want to know, I thought it would be a good way of ending this—this—oh, I don't know what to call it—of the last few days. It's been perfectly hateful . . . nothing but 'acrimony'!"

Mrs Petrie rose. "Of course you must go, my dear," she said: "perhaps it *will* do you good. I can manage the house perfectly well while you're gone."

"Manage!" exclaimed Cynthia; "what managing is there, except getting the suppers?—and Freda can do that. Mrs Simpson will do the rest. I'll get everything perfectly straight before I go, and I shall be back before you've had time to notice that I'm gone. . . . You might cheer up now, mummy. It's only the next station but two that I'm going to—not the North Pole, or anything like that. . . ."

But Mrs Petrie did not cheer up. "Oh, I know it is all *perfectly* simple, my dear."

She implied that there were subtleties and complications and hidden difficulties that Cynthia could not even suspect; and she went out of the room.

Cynthia did not particularly want, any more, to spend a fortnight with the Chills. The whole suggestion seemed to be as pointless and futile as the argument with her mother had been. But she resolved to go; and upon this resolution, though it was now cold and utterly lifeless, she supported herself.

She had said she would go, and go she certainly would.

. . . . . .

§ 5

Freda walked to the station with her the following Tuesday morning. As they went along, Cynthia felt a thrill of triumph in having carried this thing through. She felt a sense of initiative, new strength.

As they crossed the lines for the Down platform, she said, "Mind now, if the Spiers say any more about it, do say you will go as soon as I get back. . . . I'm sure it would be a great deal better if we could *all* get away for a bit like other people. Mother, too; it would do her all the good in the world, to get away from the fussing and worrying. . . . And mind, Free, do let me know at once if she is ill, and I'll come back. . . ."

"H'm," said Freda gloomily. "Isn't she always ill?"

"Yes, but I mean *ill*," Cynthia answered; "*really* ill. You will be able to tell: I don't mean just fussy, because she's *made* like that, I suppose. Still, I've left nothing for any of you to fuss about. It's all in apple-pie order—even the meals. . . ."

Wardrup, the carpenter, followed them down the platform and got into the compartment after Cynthia, mumbling his "G'mornin, Miss, excuse me kindly—thank you," and touching his cap.

Freda casually and cheerfully took his greeting to herself, answered it accordingly, and stood talking to Cynthia over the window-ledge till the train went out.

Wardrup looked long at the strapped bag beside Cynthia and then said, "Away at last, Miss?"

"Oh no. Only for a day or two just now," she answered shortly. The necessity for this answer jarred upon her. She had waved her hand to Freda in triumph.

Now, with this admission, the illusion of triumph was gone.

The fellow had annoyed her, too, by the proprietary—almost familiar—manner of his 'good-morning' and his assured stride to the corner of the compartment; and also he had offended her by the friendly way Freda had answered him. . . . Then she tried to picture poor Mr Wibleigh, the man who had astonished her by his comical proposal, at Wardrup's age—Mr Wibleigh before his skin became porous and blotchy, before the red of his eyelids spread to the dull whites of his eyes, before the four hairs grew out upon his nose, before his hands became purposeless and fat and moist and boneless. . . .

Chapter Six

§ 1

THE easy companionship of the Chills made her think what a mountain she had made out of this molehill—this perfectly simple thing of coming away for a fortnight; yet when nine days of it had passed, she decided to go home on Saturday instead of Tuesday. . . .

It would be a pleasant little surprise for her mother; for she had, after all, cheered up wonderfully before Cynthia left. She had assumed the little responsibilities with a grand little air. She deserved a reward, encouragement. . . .

It was on Saturday, therefore, that Cynthia went home.

Turning from Station Road into the High Street she saw Petrie in the distance, coming towards her. She noticed at once how vastly he differed from everyone else on the crowded pavements, though there was nothing striking enough in his dress to distinguish him from the men around him. His collar was low and soft, his grey suit a little worn perhaps, but these were details, and could not set him apart at a distance of a hundred yards.

What did distinguish him at a glance from other men was the fact that Petrie in his study or his bedroom and Petrie in the High Street were in every detail the same person—which is a thing that can be said of not one man in a thousand. The act of stepping from the hearth to the public highway transforms men as by magic. The assumption of a hat still possesses some of its mystical properties, and this phenomenon is not confined to its most glaring examples—policemen and tram-conductors.

With the placing of his hat upon his head—whether the hat be a recognised emblem of his office or simple billy-cock or bowler, the individual placer ceases at once to be an individual father with an irritable disposition, a collector of china or butterflies, a bee-keeper, or a fancier of sweet-peas. He assumes at

once his character of a public unit in the public scheme. He squares his shoulders and looks out upon the world with an importance which is neither greater nor less than his domestic importance, but merely differs from it. In dining-room or study the ordinary man is one thing; in the High Street, hatted and walking-sticked, where the tram picks up people coming from the station, he is quite another: but not so Petrie. This fact alone would have sufficed to win for him the reputation for eccentricity that he enjoyed.

As he walked along the pavement among the busy shoppers, he might just as well have been ambling from his desk to the piano. The housewives and perambulators in his way could just as well have been intervening pieces of furniture. His nondescript hat was nothing to him, thrust away as it was from his brow to the back of his head. It obviously had not got upon his head in the process of any rite; it appeared to have got there by the merest accident. His stick remained under his arm also by accident—the pressure of his humerus upon his ribs. His pipe hung as ever from his teeth between lips parted in the whimsical smile that now often took the place of the old wry one. Upon everyone who passed him he bestowed the inoffensive stare of an artist, the stare that people other than artists can bestow only upon inanimate objects.

"Hello, father," said Cynthia, "fancy meeting *you*."

"On the contrary," said Petrie, "I am exactly here at exactly this same hour every day. Fancy, *I* should say, meeting *you*. I thought it was Tuesday that you returned—whither away now?"

"Oh, home, of course—for some tea," said Cynthia. "Let's take the car—I'm sick of carrying this thing."

"Let us do no such thing," said Petrie. "Let us rather repair to yonder caravanserai named, Heaven only knows why, the 'Bungalow,' and let us there drink our dish of tea. We will leave the luggage of which you so bitterly complain at the aforesaid misnamed 'Bungalow,' and walk as far as the gas works on Wilton's Hill. There we will take the air with our good fellow-citizens of Pelchester."

"Oh, *father*!" Cynthia exclaimed.

Petrie turned and looked at her a moment. "If you have anything else to do, Cynthia," he said very solemnly, "or if you would rather not—for Heaven's sake say so. Please don't do anything against your own wishes to meet any imagined need of mine—now or at any other time. Remember that, Cynthia, please." His seriousness struck Cynthia, at that moment, as slightly comical.

She touched his arm. "Indeed I'm not tired, daddy," she said, "or anything else of that sort. . . . It's just . . ." but she did not say what it was, for the very simple reason that it was very difficult to say that kind of thing to Petrie. Her thought was that she had never before, to her knowledge, been out for a walk with him; that she had never even considered the possibility of such a thing, and her delight in the prospect had surprised her into the exclamation.

They left her bag with the woman in the cash-desk, and sat down at a table from which they could see every other table in the room.

Cynthia hurried over her tea because she was impatient to be off upon the walk; Petrie hurried because he had hurried over every meal he had eaten in the last twenty years.

Soon they were upon the road leading out of the High Street and named—from the same fantastic lack of all reason that the three-storeyed, party-walled 'Bungalow' was named the 'Bungalow'—'Queen's Walk.'

He was astonishingly gay as they tramped along, fooling almost as she would have expected Conrad to fool.

Laughing at some silly joke he had made, with an absurd gesture he flicked a broken beer-bottle out of their path with his stick.

Cynthia, too, smiled—at his laughter and at the slanting sunlight on the hill in front of them. She slipped her arm within his and said, "You *do* love talking nonsense, daddy, don't you? I do believe you could be quite funny, you know."

"You are right," said Petrie; "I could, and can—and as a matter of fact I often *am*. Your brother, too, I find is a humorist—though of a somewhat broader school than myself. I had the pleasure of meeting him on the stairs the other day

carrying a small new writing-cabinet. I, like a fool, asked him what it was, and he said, with tremendous solemnity, 'A steam roller. Being a gift from Mrs Petrie to her daughter, in brackets Mrs Beethoven.' I'm blest if I can say *why*, but there was something distinctly comical about the boy's remark. It must have been his dignity, I should think—his dignity with me is always colossal."

Cynthia had stopped following his words; she was merely waiting for him to finish.

"I wonder what possessed mother to get me a writing-cabinet," she said, slightly frowning. "Poor mother!"

"Never heard of the Greeks, I suppose, when they bear gifts?" said Petrie.

She never had, but she knew from the way he said it that it was not said out of kindness. "I do so wonder," she said, "—in fact I'm always wondering, what you and mother could have quarrelled about. . . ."

Petrie said abruptly, "I would have you know that I have never quarrelled with a single soul in all my life."

"Oh, very well, then," said Cynthia; "if it wasn't a quarrel, I would like to know what it *could* have been that happened."

"Nothing whatever *did* happen," said Petrie. "That—as the phrase goes—is just it. The fact of the matter is that your mother, poor woman, has simply omitted to find her *modus vivendi*. . . . Heaps of people do, you know. . . . Yes, poor woman. . . ."

"If you're as sorry as all that for her, I don't see why you never *do* anything for her."

Petrie laughed. "And why," he said, "don't you?"

Cynthia thought a few moments in silence, and then said, humbly, "I know. It *is* difficult. . . . Poor mother. . . . I do think though, father, that you could be—just a little—sort of *kinder* to mother, you know."

"Then," said Petrie, so calmly that they might have been discussing the time of a train, "you are quite wrong. When once you have taken, let us say, a butterfly away from its proper element and its proper butterfly food—when you have once done this, whether by accident or oversight—it is utterly impossible to be kind. It is no kinder to offer it venison, or

game, or even larks' tongues, than simply beefsteak. It is sentimental—but it is not the least bit kind. You see, if you have no stock of butterfly food—well, what are you to do ? "

" And was it by accident, then, or oversight—that you married mother and brought me into the world ? "

" H'm," said Petrie, " we parents are a much-abused class. It is most unjust that our offspring should reproach us—*Bringing* them into the world indeed ! As though we *forced* life upon them ! We merely give them the option of it. . . . If you don't like it—well," he shrugged his shoulders, " there's hemlock and canals, to say nothing of dozens of perfectly good veins almost on the very surface. You need bear me no malice on that score. . . ."

" Indeed I do not," said Cynthia. " To tell you the truth, I think I am getting very fond of life. To-day's been perfect, so far. But tell me, why *did* you marry mother ? "

" Why shouldn't I ? " he asked. " Tell me, why shouldn't I ? I assure you, *I* feel no bitterness."

" I daresay you don't," said Cynthia ; " but what about mother ? "

" Ah, yes," said Petrie. " Yes, Cynthia, I did her quite an injury. I admit that. Still, if I had not done it, the odds are a thousand to one that some one else would have—so I feel no remorse. On the contrary, I am very often intensely happy ; more often than most people, I think. To-day, for instance. . . ."

" Oh, yes," said Cynthia ; " do tell me what has put you in such a good temper to-day."

" A *phrase*," said Petrie, with great gusto ; " the phrase being ' beauty of function.' "

He paused dramatically over the disclosure, and Cynthia, seeing from the pause and the gesture that the disclosure had, in fact, been made, said, " Well, I must say it doesn't take very much to cheer *you* up."

" It's not very much," said Petrie, " it's merely a label that is not inconsistent with the rest of my views on the subject of Beauty. It is not very likely to interest you much before you are seventy or seventy-five years of age, for you are not, by nature, what I call a thinker. I am ; and so, having agreed

that there is a beauty of form and sound and colour, it is nice to have a name for the thing that preoccupies people who write books and plays and make jokes and that kind of thing. Contemplation of sound makes a musician, and so contemplation of function makes a writer—and a reader. D'you see ? "

" Um," said Cynthia, " yes."

" And so," he continued, " my interest in yourself is due to the fact that you share with the rest of humanity in this business of functioning. . . . At the present moment, owing to a few accidents such as your age and sex and your aptitude to contemplate sound, and your ambition and sentimentality, and the relationship of daughters to the mothers, your functioning is made somewhat intense and interesting. In short, Cynthia, you are in a crisis."

" I don't see anything particularly beautiful about *that* ! " Cynthia sniffed.

" N-no," he agreed ; " it is not necessarily pretty. But was the functioning of Hamlet pretty ? . . . However, that is too big a question for the moment. I am, as a matter of fact, most sympathetic with you, Cyn ; I would—help you if I could. But there ! I can't, because nobody can. ' The race is run, by one and one,' you know. It's just that that tragedy is made of—tragedy, I mean, as opposed to mere blood-letting. . . . But tell me, how far has your crisis got ? "

Cynthia hesitated before saying, " Well, we've nearly got one dress done. The Chill girls did it with me. . . ."

A roar of laughter from Petrie stopped her. As he laughed he pressed her hand to his side. " And so," he said, " they appear to encourage the plan ? "

" Oh, yes, they're ever so excited. You see, they think—well, they think I'm sure to do wonders. They—I mean the girls, not Mr Chill—have no what *you* call ' ear ' for music."

" And what does the one who does possess an ear think ? Does the possession of it make him any the less enthusiastic ? "

" Oh, no," said Cynthia ; " but he's a good deal less *excited*. He seems to have got very fond of me, and—oh, I don't know—he seems rather worried about it. I think he imagines that I am awfully young, and that it will be very hard—not music, you know, but the *life*."

"Therein," said Petrie, "I venture to disagree with the reverend gentleman. Music, my dear, is much harder than life. Any fool can live. Action, so called, is the easiest thing in the world; it does itself, usually, if you only let it. Music does not—nor does any other form of contemplation, whether it is of colour, form or—*function*. But let me tell you in confidence, Cynthia—what that benign old party is worried about is only your personal beauty."

"Oh," said Cynthia, looking up at her father, "so you do admit that I am a little pretty?"

"God forbid," said he quietly. "You are too big, for one thing, to be pretty—yards too big; physically and spiritually, too big. But to put the matter rather crudely, Cynthia, you have some first-class bait. What the old boy fears is that you might snare something strong and blundering enough to smash up the trap altogether. Of course, you might. But there is nothing to be done about it. He is quite wrong in thinking that a few years one way or the other can make any difference to that. What is summed up as 'sex' is one of the few fixes in which being forewarned is not being forearmed. Everyone ought, of course, to know the fundamental facts. . . ."

"And what are they?" asked Cynthia.

"Oh, Lord," said he, a little impatiently, "you must know them. You must have known them years ago—or rather *it*, for there is only one such fundamental fact. Briefly, it is that by the laws of nature it is far, far easier for you to become a mother than a musician. It is very alarming, and a great menace to anything else you may plan to do. It is apt to lead you into digressions; and that is what old Chill sees. It would have saved a great deal of time one way and another if I had sent you forth on this quest of yours cross-eyed and hunch-backed, with the scowl of a hell-hag and a tongue of aloes and venom: but I have, instead, complicated your quest and served the interests of Life, spelt in capitals, by sending you forth a rather magnificent creature—an unusual one at any rate, who stands a head taller than most of her fellows, who looks the world in its ugly face with a cheery smile, one with a kind, warm heart and the soft answer which turneth away wrath. Yes, I'm afraid capital Life is served, and Art is robbed. . . ."

Not even a lover could have given such words the special force that Petrie's coldness and complete detachment gave them. He said them without any license whatever, setting them forth as a mere fact, a fact that might just as well have been arrived at with a measuring tape and calipers. . . . And Cynthia breathed deeply of the fine air that came from seaward, and the colour rose to her neck and cheeks. The words he used had a glamour all their own. . . . "Looking the world in its ugly face with a cheery smile. . . . A kind, warm heart and the soft answer which turneth away wrath. . . ." He made a great possibility of the 'Life' he spoke of. He filled her with a sense of the bigness of things, the wonder of them—the wonder of herself and him and everyone else who lived the life. He gave her a glimpse of the vague, large adventure that lay before her. . . .

She only pressed his arm and said, "Well, I don't see any harm in looking fairly nice."

"Harm!" said Petrie; "Lord, I should just think there *isn't* any harm. It is a public benefaction. But from *your* point of view it is apt to confuse the issue. . . . About old Chill—what does he think of your prospects, professionally?"

"Oh, he thinks I'm clever enough and ought to do well," said Cynthia.

Petrie smiled. "He always was a first-class hoper, poor old chap!" said he. "Incidentally, he thought I was sure to 'do very well': but that is neither here nor there, for I believe I *shall* very soon 'do well,' as such things go."

Cynthia did not have time to think over this remark of his. She did not, as a matter of fact, think of it again for several years. Petrie continued, "But *you*—what do *you* think of yourself?"

"How should *I* know?" she asked. "I only wish I did. I know I'm much better than the Chills or poor old Mr Wibleigh, but that's nothing. I've got no one to compare myself to."

"*With*," said Petrie; "one *com*pares things *with*, in that sense of the word. Well, how do you think you stand compared with me, for instance? I'm only an amateur, I know—but still . . ."

"Don't be absurd," said Cynthia; "amateur indeed! I only wish I knew half as much as you about it, daddy. . . . But—well, since you *ask* me—I think your music is like your talk, somehow. It's, well—it's wonderful and clever and all that, of course—but it's—no, not *absurd*, I don't mean *absurd*, quite. . . . . "

Petrie nodded. "Extravagant is what you mean. I know. That's because it's the voice of one crying in the wilderness—and crying in the wilderness rather deranges one's vocal organs for conversational purposes. One gets into the way of shouting. I expect John the Baptist was insufferable at lunch. Poor Mrs J. B. . . . But it is the curse of the innate evangelistic spirit. The fact of the matter is that if you tell people the mere truth in a conversational tone, they put you down as a bore. If you want them to listen, you must get hold of something that is only just true and is so very nearly a lie that it looks exactly like a lie—people ignore the simple truth of things, only because it *is* so perfectly simple . . . well, having got hold of the truth which has the attraction of looking like a lie, you absolutely must *shout* it. Then they will think you very clever, and they might possibly listen. The pathos of the born evangelist is the fact that even if people won't listen, and persist for ever in not listening, the poor fellow goes on shouting—even when he is at lunch. That, I think, is why it is sometimes possible to trace vehemence and hyperbole in my own occasional conversations, and in my music. . . . Out of all this we get what my worthy employers describe as a 'Business Prupposition.' It is that you should avoid being lured into crying in the wilderness. When you are the complete artist, with finished wares to sell, you must not try to sell them to the citizens of Pelchester. It is bread they want, and it is futile trying to put them off with stones—even precious stones. You will have to get away from the borough-councillors, for in this place I find that every man, from the moment he draws his first breath, is at heart a borough-councillor."

At the top of the hill they turned and looked down upon the bricks and tiles and chimneys and corrugated iron that somewhere held the bricks and tiles and chimneys and corrugated iron that were their home.

The pavements of the High Street were thronged with pigmy figures, mostly of women intent upon their last moments of shopping. The microcosm upon which they looked was cut in two by the glittering threads of the tram-lines that ran from end to end, disappearing at each end into a huge shed. The eye was inevitably drawn away from the tram-lines to the railway station. What drew it was the newly-erected yellow sign—the largest sign in Pelchester, and the brightest—bearing the words 'Colman's Mustard.'

Cynthia looked at the sign, and Petrie looked at it.

"There," said he, "you have below you the achievements of all civilisation. They are set out for you in little upon a stage. Not one whit is missing. Everything to which the world has won its way through centuries of blood and tears is represented for you and displayed, Cynthia: and you will notice at the first glance that all is dominated by locomotion and mustard. . . . Why are we not stirred and impressed by the exploits of our fellows there below us? Moses saw just such another sight as this from a far mountain, and one other—a whole little world ambling along, thoroughly satisfied, with the wrong end of the stick in its hand. . . . Look at them erecting those new wires there in order to talk to people without necessarily seeing them. Telephones! Bah—why can't some fellow devise a way of seeing people without the necessity of talking to them? . . . O Pelchester, Pelchester, I made great sounds for you once upon a time, and you thought me a futile, noisy fellow; I piped to you and ye would not dance. . . . And what, Cynthia, does your mother think of the project?"

"Eh?" said Cynthia. She had expected that question twice in the course of their walk and aimless talk, and now she was startled by its suddenness. "Mother—oh, I haven't told her yet."

"Tell me," said Petrie, "purely as a matter of interest—is that according to plan, or otherwise?"

"Otherwise," said she quite simply. "It is quite as hard to tell her as you said it would be—much harder than *I* ever imagined possible."

"I suppose," said Petrie, "that you still insist that you *must* tell her?"

"Oh, yes," said Cynthia with perfect decision. "To-night, perhaps—or, at any rate, very soon. It's just got to be done, *some*how. But, oh dear, I do wish she wouldn't be so upset. I—but what makes you smile in that way, father?" She drew a little away from him.

"I was not aware that I was smiling, particularly," said Petrie, and again tucked her arm within his. "It's a habit I seem to have developed recently. You see, Cynthia, I—I have had to tell your mother one or two things myself, at different times. . . ."

. . . . . .

§ 2

Mrs Petrie was out when Cynthia got home; Mrs Simpson said she had "run out to do some shopping."

Cynthia stood in her bedroom, looking at the writing-desk which had been placed in her window.

As a piece of furniture it was, from every point of view, negligible. In the first place, Cynthia had never felt the need for such a thing, and in the second it would have been quite inadequate for anyone who had felt the need for something like it.

It was only in the fact that it was symbolic that its importance lay. As a symbol Cynthia smiled at it, and resented it. It marked a development in the relationship between herself and her mother; for gifts were rare things in the Petrie family. Birthdays and Christmas Day were the recognised occasions for gift-making, and the gifts themselves had acquired a ritualistic uniformity. They had resolved themselves into handkerchief cases, purses and bedroom slippers. Gifts at any other time, and of any other description, were portentous.

Cynthia tried to estimate the significance of this unusual present. It was one of those old brass-clamped boxes, measuring about twenty inches by thirty. The only thing about it to indicate its intended function was the fact that it opened up obliquely, to form an inclined surface, which people seemed to imagine necessary in those days to the act of writing. There were two little ink-pots sunk in to the top of the desk

part; the other or 'lid' half of the box was fitted with countless little pigeon-holes of different shapes and sizes. The potential secrecy of these little pigeon-holes was emphasized by the huge key stuck in the keyhole.

Cynthia had never had anything to conceal, never any correspondence to classify in pigeon-holes. She could imagine no circumstances that could make such a thing as that writing-desk necessary to her. . . . Yet she smiled, seeing her mother's motive in giving it to her.

She meant to show that she realised that Cynthia was, in a word, 'grown up.' She hoped to do this by furnishing her with a brass-bound box and tremendous key.

Then, smiling, Cynthia suddenly ceased to smile, and frowned. She perceived that she was placed at a disadvantage for the task that lay before her.

Meanwhile her mother was out—and out quite alone—shopping. Mrs Simpson had announced it as calmly as you please, as though it were the most usual and ordinary thing in the world, that she had "run out—to get in a few things." And, tidying herself, Cynthia remembered the time she had been ill, and how her mother had seemed quite able to do things when there was no one else to do them for her.

From the window of the hall she saw Mrs Petrie come in at the gate, and went to open the door for her.

"Why—Cynthia!" she exclaimed; "whatever is the matter, my dear?"

"Matter!" said Cynthia, kissing her. "Nothing's the matter, of course. I just thought I'd come home, that's all, to give you a surprise."

"*But*—my dear, you ought never to startle people like that. I couldn't, for the moment, think *what* had happened to bring you home like this. . . ."

"And so," said Cynthia, "you're so busy worrying that you haven't even had time to say whether you're pleased to see me."

She took the countless little parcels from her mother, and tucked them all under an arm.

"Of course I'm pleased, darling," said Mrs Petrie, and kissed her again. "But I do wish you had let us know. You could have done this shopping on the way from the station. . . ."

"Yes," said Cynthia, "so that you need never have gone out at all! No *thank* you; I'm very glad I didn't let you know. I *know* that it's good for you to get out."

"It upsets me," said Mrs Petrie; "makes me so 'nervy.'"

Cynthia had thought that she looked particularly sprightly as she walked in at the gate. She said, "Well, I shouldn't be surprised if even being *upset* is good for you, sometimes. But, my dear, more parcels in your bag?" . . . She gently took the bag and unpacked it.

She wanted to postpone mentioning the writing-desk till Freda and Conrad should come in, so she said, "I must go to my room now and get a bit straight."

"Haven't you been yet, then?" Mrs Petrie asked.

Cynthia could not imagine how she failed to notice that she must have been, to have taken her things off, and tidied her hair. She evaded the question by saying, "Shan't be two minutes."

In her room she sat down upon the bed to listen for Freda and Conrad. After a very short while her mother softly opened the door, and smiled. With that smile there came back to Cynthia that vague sense that Petrie had given her on the Hill, of the bigness of things. 'Life' struck her as something enormous, overpowering and baffling; something pitifully sad and tragic. . . .

Tendresse had never been a current coin in the family. It was, no doubt, Petrie that had inclined them all to feel awkward and self-conscious when sentiment became insistent in its clamourings for expression: but the appeal of Mrs Petrie's timid, childish smile was more than Cynthia could resist.

"Mother darling," she said, "how sweet of you! Thank you *ever* so much, my dear." She took her in her arms and kissed her, and realised how small she was, how frail and unresisting. Again she kissed her and said, "It's *lovely*."

Mrs Petrie looked up and smiled, the same little smile of a delighted child. "So you *do* like it, then, dear?" she asked. "I *did* hope you would. Though it can be changed, you know, for something else if you don't. . . ."

"Changed!" said Cynthia, "I should think not indeed. It's just the very thing!"

"You see," said Mrs Petrie, holding up the key, "it locks. You can keep all your things there, and no one will be able to interfere with you. You can keep it with your things in here, and now that the weather is nice and warm, and a fire isn't always necessary, you can be by yourself in here—perfectly snug and cosy whenever you like." She looked at Cynthia knowingly, and touched her cheek. "*I* know, my dear. . . . You can't tell *me*."

"It's *lovely*," said Cynthia, beginning to feel uncomfortable. Hers was the one room in the house that soon would need no furniture. But she could not say so then. "Perfectly lovely. . . . But, my dear, I *am* so hungry. Could we start without the children?"

They had barely sat down, however, when the children came in. During the meal the cheerful buoyancy of the others did not tend to relieve Cynthia's uncomfortable knowledge that she had lost a point.

"What about the Spiers?" she asked. Freda had brought in and conveyed a sense of conspiracy that Cynthia resented. The writing-desk had placed her at a disadvantage. She had lost a point there; but she saw an opportunity of winning another one.

"Oh, I might go in and see them this evening, now that you're back again," said Freda.

"I mean, have you arranged to go with them?" said Cynthia. "Has she, mother?"

"Go!" repeated Mrs Petrie, "where to? I had heard nothing about it."

"To the Isle of Wight, or wherever they're going," said Cynthia. "They asked her to go with them."

Freda was fidgeting painfully with her bread.

Mrs Petrie astonishingly said, "Well, the Spiers are quite nice people, I'm sure."

Conrad rhythmically murmured, "Hi tiddley hi ti." This was his simplest way of suggesting that the girls were a pair of idiots. They saw his point.

Nothing further was said till Conrad spoke again, this time 'in clear.' "Since it's settled, then, that we can go," he said, "I'll stroll round with you, Free, as soon as we've done

grubbing, and tell Spier that I *R.S.V.P.*, accepting with much pleasure, since my other engagements permit. . . ."

"Oh, I'd forgotten that there's a boy," said Cynthia. "I didn't know they'd asked you too."

"If I hadn't been able to go," said Conrad, "they were going to take that young Harbottle scion. Spier doesn't think much of him either, but it would have been better than a gang of sisters. You needn't say anything, Free, till I've seen Spier. He didn't want to tell his mater to ask me till he knew I could go, so that she needn't look a fool for nothing. . . ."

"Conrad, dear," said Mrs Petrie, "I do wish you wouldn't speak in that loose, familiar manner about people. . . ." Mrs Petrie never said 'do this,' or 'do not do that.' She always merely 'wished.'

Conrad said, "What I meant to convey, mother, was that seeing that the wind is favourable, I shall call upon my learned and honourable friend, John Spier, junior, and acquaint him of the fact (genitive) that, since the wind is favourable, I—snakes! I've gone and mislaid a verb or something. Ahoy there! anybody seen my verb? A pink verb with a narrow stripe set with a diamond and two gules rampant. Reward fivepence. Hours of payment, seven for seven-thirty. Thank you, lidy. . . ."

Conrad, in fine, was happy.

. . . . . .

Chapter Seven

§ 1

THE children had been gone for thirteen days, and Cynthia knew that she must have the talk with her mother while they were still away. She had been waiting for months for something to turn up to help her. The fact that they had gone did not, in fact, either help or hinder her; but in being alone with Mrs Petrie at every meal she felt vaguely that the stage was set for the crisis.

There were only two days more ahead of them, when Mrs Petrie said at lunch, "My dear, Sylvia seems to have got to know a great many nice people—through George's position in the bank, I suppose. I am quite sure that she would be very glad for you to go about with her and meet them. There is your playing to help you, you know. And in the winter there are lots of dances you could go to."

Cynthia knew that the crisis approached. She moistened her lips—then said foolishly, "H'm . . . I suppose there are."

"And there's bicycling, dear," Mrs Petrie continued. "Did you ever think of bicycling, Cynthia? I should think it's quite safe, once you get outside the town. You could quite well have a bicycle."

"Oh, yes," said Cynthia, swallowing; "perfectly safe, I should say."

She had nothing to say in the pause that followed. Mrs Petrie continued: "You see, dear, you ought to think of moving about a little now, and mixing with young people. *All* young people ought to. . . . You are not *happy*, Cynthia, as you are. It is such a worry to me. Sylvia has noticed it, too. I am obliged to wonder if it is that—that proposal you spoke of so lightly. . . ."

"Oh, *that*," Cynthia sniffed. "Good gracious, that's finished and done with ages ago. Old Mr Wibleigh asked

me to marry him, and I said I wouldn't. There was nothing in *that*. . . . Oh, yes, I'm happy enough—at least I shall be, as soon as the children are home again and I can get on with my *work* again, with the Chills and Mr Wibleigh and—father."

That was the nearest she could get to the point at that particular moment. It ought to have been simple enough for her to speak, quite quietly, some such words as, "Don't worry about me in the winter, mother; I probably shan't be here for most of it." But it was absolutely impossible for her to do it. She would do it, she thought, as soon as her pulses ceased their throbbing, forcing the blood mercilessly into her ears, flushing her cheeks so that she was obliged so hang her head to hide them from her mother. . . .

"*Dear!*" Mrs Petrie said, with such intensity that Cynthia was startled into looking up at her. "Cynthia, I want to—there's something I want to—want to say to you. . . ." So at last she had guessed! . . . Cynthia braced herself. Her mother went on, "It's not very nice for me to have to say it, dear. It's—it's—I want you to give up that weekly trip of yours to Melton. I—" Cynthia stared at her, aghast.

"Mother!" was all she managed to say.

"Yes, dear," Mrs Petrie went on, reassured, apparently, by Cynthia's response. "Yes, Cynthia, I very particularly want you to discontinue it. You need not think about the money, Cynthia. It—you shall have an allowance. *That* much, surely, your father can be made to do for you. . . ." This of Petrie, who had tossed three hundred pounds into her lap with his tobacco pouch and folding scissors. . . .

Cynthia said, "The money has nothing whatever to do with it. Of *course* I could have an allowance if I wanted one."

"Then, dear," said Mrs Petrie, "there is no reason why you should not give Melton up; and there is every reason why you should. It is not doing you any good. It is not right—or *nice*."

Cynthia thought of Wardrup the carpenter, of his throat and square, blue chin. She remembered the meeting between him and Freda. Once more the colour rose to her cheeks, her eyes tingled, and she looked away. But it was surely impossible that Freda could have said anything. . . . What,

after all, was there that she *could* have said ? Then Mrs Petrie reassured her on that score. " I mean, it isn't lady-like to go about like that, dear—alone. And it isn't *necessary*."

" It *is* necessary," said Cynthia. The throbbing of her pulse extended to her very throat. She was not eating now, but her throat opened and closed again, upon nothing. " M-mother," she stammered, helplessly, piteously.

Mrs Petrie had become quite calm again. " Yes, dear," she said, " if it were necessary, it would all be quite different. But it is *not* necessary, and nothing can make it so. Your father can provide for you, and he shall provide for you. . . ."

Cynthia only made a gesture, and stared at the vase on the table between them. She heard her mother saying, " It isn't as though I were a strong, capable woman, Cynthia. I do not think I would ask it of you then—however much I might disapprove. But I am *not* strong and capable any more. I am very little use in the house, and I dread Tuesdays—you cannot think how I dread them. It might be silly of me. Most people would, I know, say it *is* silly. . . . But there, my dear, I am what I am—weak, and silly. I *know* I am not strong. I simply hate that having you gone from morning till night. . . ."

Cynthia could hear no more. Her throat worked so that it seemed to shut her ears. The vase became indistinct ; the flowers mingled and merged into each other, and swam about like the colours in Conrad's absurd old kaleidoscope, till her hot tears fell among the prune-stones ranged along the edge of her plate. She thrust back her chair and hurried away.

She hurried past the little passage leading to the study, and ran up the stairs to her bedroom.

She banged the door to, and saw, through the blinding tears, her writing-cabinet lying empty and open upon her little table. That, too, she shut with an angry slam. Then she turned once more to the door and twisted the key round in the rusty lock. After that she collapsed upon the bed.

" Damn ! " was the only coherent sound she made ; and presently, " Damn. . . . Damnation take and blast it ! "—she, who was to discontinue going to Melton in the train, lest it should not be considered strictly lady-like.

Then she merely wept—hot, great tears of anger, pity and remorse. Mostly, however, the tears were of anger—anger with herself for having been such a coward and such a fool as to have kept her secret for all those months, anger with her mother for having had her say first, and anger with the writing-cabinet for its share in the business.

Her pillow became a shapeless, crumpled mass, her handkerchief a sodden rag. She did not hear, through her sobs, the faint rustle outside the door, or the foiled, quiet attempt to open it.

The knocking was, after a time, repeated, and Cynthia roused herself to see the chipped porcelain knob turn and the door move to the extent allowed by the play of the worn old bolt of the lock. And she felt a tremendous satisfaction in the frustration of the one without.

"Cynthia, dear," her mother said softly, "what is the matter?"

"Nothing," said Cynthia.

"I want to come in, darling."

"You can't," was the curt reply. "The door's locked."

"Open it, sweetheart," Mrs Petrie coaxed.

"Oh, I *can't*," Cynthia said impatiently. "I'm on the bed. I'll open it presently."

Mrs Petrie waited.

Cynthia got up and straightened out the bed-spread and the pillow. The miserable handkerchief she thrust into the writing-cabinet—the first thing she had ever sought to hide—and got herself a fresh one from the drawer. After quietly sponging her face and tidying her hair, she opened the door.

Mrs Petrie was still there, waiting.

She stole wistfully into the room, her hands extended to Cynthia. "My *dear*," she said, "tell me—what is the matter?"

Cynthia drew angrily away. "Matter!" she exclaimed; "it seems to me sometimes that we're all mad—the whole blithering lot of us. . . . Oh, yes, I know it is coarse-sounding and offensive for me to say 'blithering.' But that's what the *matter* is, since you want to know, mother,—stark, staring mad. . . ."

Mrs Petrie shrugged her shoulders and sat down upon the bed. "I cannot imagine," she said coldly, "what kind of homes Conrad's friends are brought up in. . . ."

"Homes!" said Cynthia. "What does it matter what people say or how they say it? It's what we *do* that counts. Homes! *we* are nice ones to talk of homes. Just *look* at us."

"My dear, what can the matter be?" said Mrs Petrie; "what *can* you have done to upset you so?"

"What can *I* have done? I like that. Yes, what *can* I have done?"

"Well, what *I* have done, then!" said Mrs Petrie, and braced herself upright on the edge of the bed. "What have I done, Cynthia?"

Cynthia shrugged her shoulders. She had a fine contempt for passion now that her own was spent. "Oh, nothing," she said. "You have only implored me not to leave you for about eight hours a week, when it's for three years, at *least*, that I want to be gone. . . . That I *must* be gone."

"Cynthia!" said Mrs Petrie, and again, slowly, "Cynthia . . . my dear child, what can you mean? Where to?"

"Abroad," Cynthia said shortly.

Gradually, as Mrs Petrie thought about this, her sad, listless expression became chilled into one of fear. Beyond the simple statement that Cynthia was going away from her for three years, nothing penetrated to her consciousness.

Then, very slowly, she began to wonder. As she wondered, she looked up again and held out her hands, pitying Cynthia for the great trouble that was so torturing her.

"Darling," she said, "how should any such thing have happened to you that it should be necessary for you to be away from home—*for three years*?"

"Nothing has happened to me," said Cynthia, "—yet. But something is *going* to happen to me. I am going to become a musician. I am going to Holzgarten."

It was the fear and pity now that faded from Mrs Petrie's face. She stared at Cynthia. Staring, her mouth hardened and her eyes coldly glittered. "So *that*," she said very quietly, "is what he has been doing! . . . I see it all now. Very well, Cynthia—I have nothing more to say."

"You are talking nonsense, mother," Cynthia said fiercely. "You always *do* talk nonsense about father, if you say anything at all. He's—he's sort of funny, at times, I will admit, but aren't we all a little bit funny, if it comes to that? That's no reason for saying that kind of thing."

"I do not propose to say anything at all," said Mrs Petrie coldly. "I have said my say, and *more* than my say, already." With hands clenched, and head bravely erect, she moved to the door; but Cynthia could not let her go thus.

"Don't, mother," she said sharply; "you don't understand a bit. . . ."

"There *is* nothing more for me to understand," she said. "It is all perfectly clear now, I assure you, my dear. You must go. *I* will not be accused of standing in your way. . . . If I am ill. . . . Well . . ." she shrugged her shoulders again, then bravely squared them.

"You know quite well," said Cynthia, "if it was a question of your being *ill*, I would not *think* of going. Were you ill while I was away at the Chills?"

"What does it matter?" asked the mother, very coldly. "One cannot allow other people to sacrifice themselves to one's health."

With that she went out of the room.

. . . . . .

§ 2

At four o'clock Cynthia was seated at one of the small tables in the misnamed Bungalow tea-room. She had gone there because she could not accept either of the alternatives open to her if she had stayed at home—the alternative of herself taking a tray up to Mrs Petrie in the bedroom, or else of sending it up by Mrs Simpson. The latter would have been too deliberate a slight if she herself had been in the house. . . .

The thing was done now, she kept telling herself, as soon as Mrs Petrie had gone out of the room. She had said what had to be said, anyway. In that reflection there was tremendous relief. The strain was snapped; the ice at last was broken. Only action now remained.

By what seemed to be no less than inspiration she had resolved upon a definite and decided action, and then set out for the Bungalow.

At the Bungalow she expected to find some diversion in the presence of other people, in the mild gaiety of drinking tea with no responsibility whatever in the getting of it. She had found such diversion when she had been there last, with Petrie.

But she found none now.

The place was nearly empty. The three waitresses whispered together near the cash-desk; from that point of vantage they looked upon their few premature customers in the light of trespassers.

Seated by herself at her little table, Cynthia looked about her and could see nothing funny. She looked first at a stout, dowdy, middle-aged woman, whose countless parcels knocked clumsily against every piece of furniture in the room as she came in. From her Cynthia looked at a careworn, bald man, who wrote rapidly in a small pocket-book, with a stylographic pen that leaked over his fingers. At the table next to his there sat a thin, hard-visaged young woman, who treated one of the waitresses to one or two ill-humoured, sarcastic remarks about the hot water. Not one of them had come to the place from any joy of life. They had come only because some accident or other had made it the least of evils for them. The sight of them was sordid. The sound of the crockery was no merry tinkle, as it had been when Petrie sat beside her making a prodigious meal of sugared buns. It was a most irritating noise.

Cynthia was looking, for the first time, to the world for succour and comfort, and the world was failing her dismally.

She remained quite alone.

She sat over her sponge-cakes in her loneliness, thinking her inconclusive thoughts, till the round clock above the cash-desk showed five minutes to five. Then she paid her bill, and walked briskly down the High Street. After a few hundred yards she turned to the left, into a road of detached villas built of yellowy-drab bricks.

One of these was distinguished from the others by a large brass plate bearing the legend:

DR DRUCE HARBOTTLE,
Physician and Surgeon.
A.M. 9–11.
P.M. 5–7.

The two bell-ropes were illogically classified 'Night' and 'Visitors.' Cynthia, puzzled for a moment, eventually pulled them both, and soon disappeared into the gloomy hall.

§ 3

It was well after seven when she got home. She prepared a cup of arrowroot and two pieces of dry toast, which she took upstairs and placed, without a word, on the chair beside her mother's bed.

Then she carried a large tray into the study and announced to Petrie, "I'm going to have supper in here with you to-night, father. Mother's gone to bed, so there's only you and I to worry about. If you're not ready to have it yet, I can come back again when you are."

"I'm ready," said Petrie, and pushed his papers aside. "I can ascribe this honour to nothing but a general movement, Cynthia. Am I not right in thinking that there has been some—movement?"

She hated the words he used, with his absurd pose of detachment, but he turned in his chair to look at her, and looking, he smiled. She forgot his silly words, for his smiling face and his gesture of turning towards her were as water to her in her desert of utter loneliness. She gratefully drank of it, and sat down quietly upon the piano-stool.

Petrie wheeled his chair round so that his head and shoulders were a silhouette against the rosy window-panes. The few silent moments were a taste of rare companionship. The old Chickering Grand lay mute between them, with the mystery of strife and ecstasy and torment it held for them both. . . .

Thus she sat on, gazing intently at the massive head, for-

getful—or unmindful—that though she could see nothing of its features in the shadow, her own were illumined for him by the twilight.

In them Petrie saw the loneliness and the weariness of strife; he saw the peace of submission and the vague, insatiable longing that makes the adventurers, strivers and loafers of the world.

"And so," he said, "at last we have some movement. . . . Cynthia, old girl, I don't think you will ever understand your mother. It is quite useless your trying."

"Do you think *you* understand her, then?" Cynthia challenged.

"Yes," said Petrie. "I understand her perfectly."

"Oh, do you!" said Cynthia; "then I don't see why you don't *do* something about it. For I can assure you," she went on, "that there is room for a great deal to be done."

"*That*," said Petrie, quite unruffled, "is exactly the point at which you are wrong. The man who understands the calculus and conic sections is no more able to alter the truth that two and two invariably make four—than our Mrs Simpson."

This type of conversation met no demand that Cynthia made. Whether Petrie told great Truth or talked nonsense, was equally unsatisfying to her at the moment, equally beside the point, and fantastic. She wearily dropped her chin into her hands and said, "Oh dear. It *is* so difficult, so appallingly difficult. . . . If only . . ."

"*Cynthia!*" exclaimed Petrie, "for the love of Heaven don't droop your head like that and whine. Do whatever else in the world you please. Howl aloud, swear, blaspheme—anything, *any*thing but that." He composed himself again from this outburst, and continued in his even tones of simple narrative. "The fact of the matter is, Cynthia, that I cannot, at any price, stand whining. My objection to it is not a reasonable, intellectual one. I see the naturalness of whining quite well. I am sympathetic. So its action on me must, I think, be a physical one. It either paralyses me completely, so that I am quite unable to answer the simplest questions, or else it makes me think, quite stupidly, of some-

thing quite beside the point—the price of boots, for instance, or where I could have put those Sullivan manuscripts. It has acted upon me like that for years now. . . ." He walked slowly across the room to her, and laid his hand upon her head. "In other words," said he, "cheer up, Cynthia, and let us quietly have a look at things."

Instead of cheering up, she drew a deep breath and said, "Oh, well, it's every bit as hard as you said it would be, daddy."

"For whom?" asked Petrie, and sat down again.

"For me, at any rate," said Cynthia.

"And do you think it is easier for others? Easier than the sharp, short and sure way would have been?"

"Of course, I realised that it would *be* hard for mother," said Cynthia. "But it's got to be made easier. It's just *that* that I want to talk to you about, now."

"Very well, then," said Petrie; "since you are prepared to do the talking. For I have nothing to say on that score. I have told you all I know about your mother. It cannot be made easier for her. . . . An amputation is an amputation; and the only question possible about it is whether you are going to perform it, or whether you are not."

"But, father," said Cynthia, "isn't all this talk about amputation and heart-breakings and punishment, and things like that, the most absurd nonsense in the world? . . . Three years! Good gracious, why, three years is just nothing!"

"Of course it's all absurd," said Petrie, "but it is, none the less, true. You will be amazed, as you grow older, Cynthia, at the number of absurd things in the world that are true. See! I tell you that your mother will cower in the most abject manner, under the blow of your going away from her. And why? . . . simply because she is sure—honestly and genuinely sure—that by going you would commit the basest treachery the world could ever be called upon to witness, on the part of a daughter towards her mother. It is perfectly absurd that she should believe such a thing; yet it is perfectly true that she *does* believe it. She believes it so firmly that she could quite honestly declare it, upon her oath, to be the truth."

"H'm," said Cynthia; "and talking like that doesn't help to make it any easier."

"*I* promised no help," said Petrie, and exasperated her by the lifeless way he said it. She felt as though she could never get to the real point in anything.

Petrie played, by his utter lack of feeling, on one side of truth; and Mrs Petrie, by her equal lack of calm, played aimlessly on the other; but the *reality*—Life, or whatever else you chose to call it—*Life* as indicated by the fine muscle of Wardrup the carpenter and by the sparkle of his skin, by the happy couples on Wilton's Hill, and by something that stirred vaguely within herself—Life, they never touched upon. Between it and themselves one of them interposed cold, self-satisfying phrases, and the other . . .

"The fact of the matter is," said she impatiently, "that you do not realise mother is *ill*. That is why you can be so hard, and not understand properly."

"On the contrary," said Petrie, "I diagnosed the case nearly a quarter of a century ago—while the patient was still insisting that she was perfectly well."

She was again stirred up by the priggishness of his claims to such wonderful omniscience. "Oh, indeed!" she said. "And what, may I ask, was your diagnosis?"

"An index of vitality," said he with quiet satisfaction, "even lower than the normally human female."

"You may have been right," said Cynthia, "—twenty-five years ago. But what she has *now* is *Neurasthenia*." The cool authority with which she said it was intended to startle Petrie into proper humility of spirit—to bring him to her own level of good, cool sense. But he merely shrugged his shoulders in a most exasperating manner.

"I've *seen* that," said Cynthia; "it's written down in the doctor's book."

"Quite possibly," said Petrie. "It is also written large across my soul. That record, too, you may have seen. It is traced, but only faintly as yet, upon your own—and that tracing you have not seen. . . . The distinction, however, between your word 'neurasthenia' and my own, 'psychasthenia,' is a purely pedantic one. I assure you that there is no difference between my diagnosis and that fellow Bluebottle's, or whatever else his ridiculous name may be. It simply means

that your mother is a chronic social parasite, and there is an end on it."

"If you think there is any sense in saying that kind of beastly, spiteful thing, you are greatly mistaken," said she. "You said the same thing once before, and I only wished then that you hadn't. All it does is to show that you have a bad temper, and are too selfish to see another person's point of view."

"Not at all," said Petrie suavely. "Not at all, I assure you. And speaking of tempers, Cynthia—well, I wouldn't describe *you* as being at the moment in a position to throw stones. That, however, I do not in the least mind. I am sufficient of a philosopher now to be upset by no outbursts other than my own. That is a great step I have made, Cynthia. . . . But we digress. I am still waiting for your promised discourse on the emigration of daughters. . . ."

What he deserved, she thought, was a retort of 'very funny!' and a haughty stalking forth from the room. But she had no hauteur now, and she was conscious suddenly that the piano-stool had no back. She made no answer, but sat still, looking at the shadowy, gaunt form of him before her, seeing only from the gleam of teeth that he was broadly smiling.

"Cynthia," he said softly, and leaned forward. "My dear, do not be such a fool." He took her two hands in his. "So *this* is your idea of a friend, my little daughter with so much to learn! Come along, my dear, let us behave like grown-up people, you and I. There's no one else to disturb our effort." He stopped speaking, but his hands remained, caressing.

"Come," he said again, almost under his breath.

It surprised her to find that she still had tears within her, after the many she had shed that day. But one splashed down upon his hand.

He quietly drew it away and examined the drop upon it as though it were a rare gem that sparkled in the dim light. "Do you know, Cyn," he said at last, "it is—yes, b' Jove, so it is—thirteen years—since this particular thing has happened to me. You were fumbling away with your absurd, stumpy fingers at one of those tiny things of Bach's. . . . I had tried to show you, perhaps a score of times, how it ought to be done, and that was your answer. . . . Well, at any rate, it is more

than twelve, if not quite thirteen." He lowered his hand awkwardly, not knowing what to do to the tear. Finally he did nothing, but replaced the hand gently upon hers, allowing the tear to take its chance. Then giving her hands a final pat, he sat back in his chair.

Cynthia sat straight up, to check the shiver of weariness that ran down her.

"I'm sure that mother never gets a fair chance," she said. "I mean she's always so—so sort of down-trodden, it seems to me."

"She's only isolated," Petrie corrected her. "For, as far as I am concerned, I found it necessary to insulate myself. There *are* people who would, under the circumstances, have failed to insulate themselves and leaked all their current away to no purpose. My life, however, has become a masterpiece of insulation." He threw out his chest in tremendous pride. "By that means only have I been able to live. And now behold me! Not only do I live, and succeed in doing some tolerable work, but damme! I am positively happy at times."

He stopped, with his chest still thrown out, as one who waits for approbation. She had hoped, vaguely, that he might be induced to say the thing that had to be said. But he made no signs of saying anything at all. Desperately, she herself blurted it out: "Mother has got to go too. That is all there is about it."

"Go?" said Petrie, "where on earth do you propose sending your mother to?"

"*Sending* her nowhere," said Cynthia, resting her back by clasping her arms behind it and stretching. "She's got to come with *me*. . . . The doctor said so."

"The devil he did!" said Petrie. He said it very quietly, when, by all the rules, Cynthia had expected him to leap to his feet and rail at her.

He continued undisturbed, merely repeating slowly, "The devil he did. . . . The *doctor*. . . . H'm. I must say that *that* solution merely omitted to present itself to *my* mind. . . . Funny thing, but I never even thought of the possibility of it."

"No," said Cynthia, tremendously relieved again that what

she had to say had been said. "It never occurred to me either. . . . And when the doctor suggested it—well, it just seemed the most natural thing in the world. . . ." She was thinking of the shock his suggestion had given her; his calm voice and silly smile as he said, "My dear young lady, a change is the very thing for her—and a mother is the very thing for you to have with you. . . ." Truly she had never even thought of it. . . . And it was the solution to the whole difficulty.

She had expected everyone in the world but Petrie to agree that it was the solution, and now even he had not disagreed. . . .

She thought of the numbed way she had stood at the end of the doctor's road, and of the girls and men, who were so patently a part of 'Life,' walking away from her to Wilton's Hill, leaving her to stand by herself. . . .

"Yes," said Petrie, "devilish funny. . . . Have you—er—I mean, what does she say about this?"

"I don't know," said Cynthia. "I only made up my mind about it this evening after seeing the doctor. I haven't told her. . . ."

"H'm!" said Petrie. He looked at her in the gloom, thinking. The thoughts pulled down his brows and pursed up his lips. They brought his teeth together till the muscles flickered in his blue jowls. "I shouldn't tell her, then, Cyn—for a day or two. Not till you've got it all worked out, you know. Sleep on the idea for a bit, I mean. Yes, that's the thing to do. Sleep on it. Let's have some light now, and something to eat. It's been there for nearly two hours waiting for us. . . . We must talk of this idea of yours again before you put it to her, Cyn."

"I'll get some tea," said Cynthia. "Might as well have it now, don't you think, with our supper?"

When she had gone, Petrie got up and lighted the gas. "Great heavens!" he said, and shook his head. "Pluck, they call it. . . . Fortitude! . . . Tcha! Pshaw! . . . Idiocy! Suicide! Futility! Lord! if decent people would only shriek aloud at the first suspicion of pain, instead of suffering it in silence like the fine, graven idiots that we are, I believe the world would be a far more decent place to live

in. . . . It looks as though the girl were a perfect fool after all. But of course she's young yet. . . ."

When she returned and they had begun to eat from the little table drawn to the hearth between them, Petrie said, "I take it, then, that there has been some slight interchange of ideas on the subject of Holzgarten."

"Yes," said Cynthia. "To-day. There was inclined to be a bit of a scene in fact—only—I—I bolted."

"That's right," said Petrie. "Always bolt from scenes, if you *can*. But be prepared to face the issue—if you must. But there usually isn't any issue from a scene—apart from the scene's own value, which is purely dramatic—æsthetic. However, don't risk another scene—not, at any rate, without consulting your friend."

They ate on in silence for a while, till Cynthia looked up squarely at her father for the first time, and said, "You *are* a funny man, you know, dad. I thought you would be simply furious about this thing . . . 't seems to me you *are* furious, only you won't show it. . . ."

Petrie was a little startled by that. "Of course I am not furious. Why should I be furious over another person's plan for the ordering of her own life? 'Live and let live,' say I, not 'live and force to live in such and such a way.' . . . I—I—well, to tell you the honest truth, I am not greatly impressed by the *wisdom* of your plan. You will find that hard and conscientious work leaves very little time and energy for social obligations; and that is probably why I did not immediately advocate your carrying a social obligation with you during a period of work and intensive development. You—you *must* . . ." his voice was beginning to rise in excitement, but by a visible effort he checked it and said quite quietly again, "Let us leave it for the moment. We must think it over. . . . After all, there is no immediate hurry for a day or two. . . ."

Cynthia yawned as she collected the plates and empty cups upon the tray.

She had never before lived through such a day.

. . . . . .

Chapter Eight

§ 1

PETRIE was already in the study the next morning when Cynthia took in his breakfast. He was pacing up and down the room, finishing the pipe he had found half-smoked under his pillow.

"I say, Cynthia," he said excitedly, "I—I didn't hear you talking to your mother last night, did I?"

"You may have heard me saying good-night to her," she replied casually. The question, however, on second thoughts, surprised her. "Why?" said she.

"Oh, nothing," said Petrie, "nothing at all. . . . I just wondered if perhaps you had forgotten about your promise to say nothing till . . ."

"It isn't likely that I'd choose *that* time of night for breaking it," said Cynthia, "when mother had one of her headaches, too."

"I say," said Petrie in some consternation, "you—you don't mean that there is any *chance* of your breaking your promise, do you?"

He reminded her of Conrad, the way he nearly pouted over the thought. She smiled indulgently. "Of course not," she said; "old silly!"

With that she left him staring at his breakfast tray, sucking a dismal tune through the ashes in his pipe.

He sat down before his breakfast, mumbling and occasionally swearing. He drank some tea and tried to eat his bacon, but the stress under which he laboured and fidgeted proved too much for him. Finally he gave up the effort of trying to eat, and lighted a fresh pipe. "There *is* no other way, my son," he said, shaking his head. "You know that. You are only funking it. . . ."

Then, as an artist sets to work upon a canvas, he set to work upon his tray. The bacon he rolled up in several thicknesses

of paper, and laid in a drawer of his desk with one piece of toast and the boiled egg. Most of the contents of the teapot he emptied into the pot of the palm which was placed every spring in his fireplace. He broke up the remaining piece of toast, and spread crumbs with butter and marmalade upon the plate; and then he stepped back, still the artist, to survey his handiwork. He smiled his satisfaction, till suddenly he exclaimed, "Idiot. . . . Will you never realise that it is details that make perfection, and that perfection is not a detail? Even you would not be credited with the eating of an egg-shell."

He promptly took the egg out of the drawer and placed it in the egg-cup. Cracking the shell, he softly swore at the softness of the egg. He looked instinctively to the fireplace, but only the palm and a faded paper screen were there to meet his appeal, and deny it. From the fireplace his gaze wandered about the room, but saw nothing that met the situation. He looked at the parcel of bacon, and slowly prodded the yolk of the egg. It was obviously too soft for a parcel. Then with a grunt of discovery he picked up a broad, lacquered paper-knife. With this he scraped a little hole at the roots of the palm, and in it very carefully buried the yolk of the egg. "In our next sojourn on this merry planet," he remarked, "we will be careful to form the habit of preferring our egg boiled hard."

But he realised that he had, for the last few minutes, been only playing. The realisation that play was now ended brought back the wistful, perplexed look, and again he paced the room, thinking, and jingling the keys in his pocket. Then, when resolution had come out of the perplexity, he softly opened the door into the hall, and leaving it very slightly ajar, sat down at his desk, to wait.

As he had expected, he heard footsteps, and an unseen hand pushed the door shut.

"That you, Cynthia?" he called.

"Yes," said she; "want me?"

"As a matter of fact," said Petrie, fidgeting again as she came in, "I do. I am frightfully sorry—it is most careless and thoughtless of me, I know—very sorry indeed; but the

fact of the matter is I—er—I want a note delivered at—one of my offices." He looked helplessly at her. "I—er . . ."

"My dear father," said Cynthia in astonishment, "whatever is wrong with you? One would think something *dread*ful had happened. . . . It hasn't, has it? . . . You know perfectly well that I go out every morning and pass them both, either going or coming back."

"To be sure," said Petrie, "to be sure! but I had forgotten it. Clean forgotten it; and besides, this is a very *urgent* note. I would like it to go rather before your usual time for going out. I would, in fact, like it to go at once, Cynthia."

"Well," said Cynthia, "I might just as well go and do the shopping now, and do the other things when I come in. Let's have the note."

"Oh, yes, of course, the note," said Petrie. "I've not written the note yet. You see, I wanted to make quite sure that you would take it for me, before writing it."

"Of course, it *is* such a terrible lot to ask a person to do!" said Cynthia, laughing.

"You don't understand," said Petrie. "You don't understand at *all*. It is directly opposed to all my principles, this casual making of casual demands upon other people—particularly upon people younger and more vigorous than oneself. It is a filthy habit, and one which I positively abhor. Only the direst necessity could drive me to indulge in it. . . ."

"Well, if it's as important as all *that*," said Cynthia, "why don't you come along with me? We could each take a turn at carrying the letter. . . . It's a grand morning, father. Perfectly lovely out."

Petrie looked at the sky, dazzling blue, through his window, and at the golden motes dancing in a sunbeam across his desk. . . . It was, indeed, a grand morning. Cynthia too looked out of the window.

The cobwebs in the neglected, overgrown hedge still sparkled with dew. A robin hopped about with an air of tremendous consequence, and stared up impudently with his beady eyes at the two who seemed to prefer dust and shadow to sunshine and free, fresh air. Looking up at them, amazed and incredulous, he puffed out his throat and sang. An errand-

boy in the road, sharing the robin's view of life and sunshine, whistled lustily and scraped his basket along the wooden paling.

"Come on," said Cynthia, "hurry and get your boots on. I'll be ready in no time."

Petrie, still looking out of the window, slowly shook his head. "Can't," he said shortly. "I've work to do. Work that's simply *got* to be done. . . . Yes—I'll write the note for you while you get ready. . . ."

"Ten minutes," said Cynthia, and went back to the kitchen.

"Now what the devil can I say?" Petrie mumbled, sitting down to his desk. "And to whom? . . . Yes, that's much more to the point—to whom? . . ." He paused, listlessly knocking the penholder between his teeth. "What on earth are all those fellows' names? . . . Blest if I know a single one of them. Oh, yes, I *do* though—Burbage. But which one of them *is* Burbage? It doesn't matter, but I believe it's that bald, sandy individual who does the invoices so prettily. He'll do. . . ." Then he began to write.

"DEAR MR BURBAGE,—I greatly fear that I left a pocket-knife upon my table yesterday. Would you be so very good as to see, and to hand it, if you are so fortunate as to find it, to my daughter?

"I apologise for causing you this trouble, but can say by way of excuse that the knife is an extremely valuable one, and is made even more valuable to me by the association of many happy memories.—Yours sincerely,

"CHARLES PETRIE."

The letter apparently pleased him, for he smiled as he sealed it. "Ass!" he chuckled, and drew from his pocket an old knife with a chipped bone handle and one of its blades broken off. The other blade, worn to the shape of a scimitar, often fell open in his pocket. It was the only knife that Petrie had known for twenty years. He grinned affectionately upon it, and again said, "Ass! . . . Memories indeed! I'm blest if I know even where or how I acquired you—and four-pence, I should say, would very nearly have obtained you even in your pristine glory."

The blade, as he turned the knife over in his hand, fell open. "Treacherous little scoundrel! I knew you'd get me like that one of these days, except that your time is up." He tossed the knife into the bottom drawer, with Cynthia's money and the sealing-wax and string. "I'll go about without a knife now, till I remember to get me another one. . . ."

"Ready?" asked Cynthia at the door.

"Yes, here you are," said Petrie, and again his smile died.

She was wearing her large straw hat with its cluster of roses, and in her hand she swung a shopping-basket. Petrie stood at the door and watched her as she crossed the hall. Then he shut the door and sank wearily into his chair. "Lord!" he exclaimed, "what prey! . . . She could carry a whole damned household about on those wonderful shoulders of hers, and not know she was doing it till her back was broken. . . . And why the devil can't she see it as I see it? Why can *no* one else see it? . . . That fool, Harbottle, for instance —confound his frozen little soul. . . ."

But he could sit still no longer. Hearing the garden gate click behind her, he got upon his feet again and moved about the room. His hands twitched away in his pockets, with his money and his keys. His pipe bobbed up and down as he bit savagely upon its stem. Then he stopped, gazing out again at the sunshine and the robin.

The robin looked up at him with his chest thrust out, swaggering, challenging. Petrie had forgotten to give him his crumbs, even as Cynthia had forgotten to take away the tray. He fetched a crust from the tray, and softly raised the window.

"I apologise, old fellow," he said, as he crumbled the toast upon the ledge, at the end of which the robin now sat. "I'm sorry. One ought not, I know, to let these personal incidents come between one and one's public obligations. But it isn't a *little* thing that I've got on hand. It's a devilish big one, really. The biggest, I think, that ever occurs in a life. . . ." The robin hopped away to grapple with the crumb it had picked up, and Petrie stood looking at it, but thinking very far away. He rested his cheek against the side of the window, looking down sadly, and utterly weary of sadness. "H'm.

Yes, yes, yes." He sighed. "The fact of the matter is that *one* of them has *got* to go to the wall—for a while at any rate. . . ." The robin hopped up for another crumb. "Ah, but that, believe me," continued Petrie, arguing now, "is where you are quite wrong, my friend. No. She is quite incapable of seeing it for herself. Of course; I agree: she *ought* to see it. But there you are!—she *can't*. Psychasthenics never can. That is the nature of their malady, and that's the very devil of it. . . . She isn't to be trusted with a thing like this, you know. . . . Some one else has got to show it to her, and I am the only one who can. . . ."

He softly lowered the window and stood in utter dejection—head bent and shoulders drooping. The robin chirped and hopped about among the bread-crumbs; then he stopped once more hard by the window-pane, and sang lustily again, right at the man.

"M'yes," said Petrie sadly. "*You* know what to do with summer and sunshine, my friend. You fellows never get let in for the things *we* get let in for. It's our habit of *talking* that does it, beyond any doubt. You never talk, you see—you only sing. That's where it is. . . . You have never, by the way, introduced me to your family. I have always accepted that old bachelor story of yours, but, frankly now, I do not believe it. I never have believed a *word* of it. . . ."

Then he looked at his watch. "Ten infernal minutes already!" he exclaimed. "And even if they keep her half an hour hunting for that ridiculous knife, the odds are that she'll hurry back immediately after."

With an effort quite visible he pulled himself together, focussing upon the door the gaze that was roving in despair about the room.

"Oh, hell!" he said softly, and hurried out.

. . . . . .

§ 2

At Mrs Petrie's bedroom door he stopped and thrust his pipe into his waistcoat pocket—the only pocket that held it in position without scattering the ashes. After drawing a

deep breath of the kind that is expected to steady one for a crisis, he lightly knocked upon the door.

"Come in, dearie," said Mrs Petrie; and the grin with which Petrie heard the words was ugly.

"It isn't Cynthia, I'm afraid," he said, slightly opening the door. "I want to talk to you very particularly, for a few minutes, Elizabeth. . . . It's extremely important. . . . May I come in?"

"Yes," said Mrs Petrie. She stiffened as she sat in bed, and drew the clothes about her. It was many years since they had met in the same room, except by accident. "Of course you may come in. Where is Cynthia?"

"Cynthia is out," said Petrie shortly. He walked in, not looking at her. He moved to the mantelpiece, staring at the odds and ends upon it: the two miniatures of Mrs Petrie's parents in their tarnished frames, scissors and a small work-basket, the little smelling-salts bottle with a stopper of twisted brown paper. She, meanwhile, moved uneasily in the bed, making futile gestures, each one of which failed of the result she aimed at. She thrust a wisp of straying hair under the lace boudoir-cap she wore, and the wisp immediately fell out again. She folded up the newspaper she had been reading, and it straightway unfolded itself. She drew the everlasting shawl about her shoulders, and the shawl fell apart. . . .

Petrie moved to the foot of the bed and folded his arms upon the rail. He moved his lips and cleared his throat, and she immediately thrust her hands under the bed-clothes.

"The—the fact is, Elizabeth," he began uneasily, "that Cynthia—well, to put the matter quite briefly, Cynthia is—as a matter of fact, I *know*—she has most remarkable gifts. She is very anxious—*no*, she has resolved—to go to the Conservatoire at Holzgarten."

Mrs Petrie looked at him and shrugged her shoulders. "From the way things had begun to go," she said quietly, "I knew that sooner or later you would succeed in doing that."

"Stuff!" said Petrie, and again drew the deep, sedative breath. "I wish you would be good enough, Elizabeth, not to interpose nonsensical remarks for a few minutes. What I

have to say to you is *serious*, and I don't know why it should be so infernally difficult for me to communicate a few reasonable thoughts to you."

"I'm sure I've always shown myself quite ready to listen to them," said Mrs Petrie.

"Well, *listen* then," Petrie snapped; and then immediately he smiled at his ill-temper. "I'm sorry, Elizabeth," he said. "I didn't come and disturb you in order to be merely peevish. The point is, as I say, that Cynthia is going to Holzgarten. Your suggestion that you should accompany her is altogether out of—well, it is quite preposterous."

"*My* suggestion!" exclaimed Mrs Petrie softly. "*My* suggestion!" and her eyes widened. "I assure you I have made no such suggestion. I have, indeed, made no suggestion whatsoever."

"Then I apologise," said Petrie quite humbly. "She said that it was not your suggestion, but I am afraid I did not believe her. I apologise, Elizabeth. The suggestion has, however, been made; but, believe me, it is utterly preposterous."

"I tell you that I have made *no* suggestion whatever," said Mrs Petrie proudly. "When Cynthia told me yesterday of this joint scheme of yours I was shocked and upset—naturally I was shocked and upset—but I did not even oppose it. . . ."

"No," said Petrie, "I can quite easily believe that you did not *oppose* it. . . . I do not remember your ever having definitely and technically *opposed* even *me*—and yet . . ." he stopped, staring bitterly at the faded wall-paper behind her head.

While he was thus staring Mrs Petrie very gingerly said, closely watching him as she said it, "The idea of my going must be Cynthia's own then."

"That may be," answered Petrie, still looking at the wall-paper, "but it is, let me tell you for the third time, *preposterous*."

"But if the girl *wishes* it . . ." Mrs Petrie persisted.

"Nonsense," said Petrie. "Enough of that, Elizabeth. It is not to be." He glared at her, grasping the bed-rail in his hands, hissing the words at her through clenched teeth.

The frail creature among the bed-clothes thrust her little face towards him, cocking up the chin with astonishing defiance.

"My dear Charles," she said very quietly, "it has never ceased to amaze me that you do not utterly wear yourself out with that theatrical manner of yours. . . . I thought you wished to say a few quiet, reasonable words. The *sense* of the matter, as it appears to me, is merely this: Cynthia ought to be the chief consideration under the circumstances. *I*, as you know —as you *both* know—do not think that music is a suitable profession for a young lady. I do not think that the loose companionship of the particular type of young person it involves is at all desirable for a daughter. But that, since Cynthia herself is to be the main consideration, is neither here nor there. I do not oppose her if she has set her heart upon it. But if Cynthia has seen of her own accord—and you assure me that this is the case—the difficulties and pitfalls in her path, and if she has decided to meet these difficulties by the very simple expedient of taking me with her . . . Well . . ." she shrugged her shoulders at him. "Dear me! . . . what would I not give to have had *my* mother with *me* in those Paris days. . . ."

"H'm," said Petrie. "I thank you. . . . But let us keep our retrospections for another time, as Cynthia will be back very shortly."

"Well," said Mrs Petrie, "why should she not come back and talk it over with us? We might then be able to discover what her opinions really are. . . ."

"Elizabeth!" said Petrie, so that the appeal in his voice startled her. "For pity's sake, Elizabeth—Good Lord! Can't you see what her opinion *must* be?"

"How should I?" asked Mrs Petrie with another shrug. "It is not with *me* that she talks over her private affairs. I assure you I have no idea what her opinion is—on this subject or any other. . . ."

"Then, by the Lord, I'll tell you!" said Petrie savagely. "You insist on exasperating me! you have succeeded. Listen then! She thinks that you're a weak, miserable, rotten thing! That is all that you have ever given her ground for thinking of you—yes, and anybody else upon whom you have been able to cast the burden of your lifeless weight. She is afraid to leave you, lest you should collapse, leaving your blood upon

her shoulders. *You are her cross*, Elizabeth." He pointed a long, trembling finger at her. "And she is courageous enough —and fool enough—to try to stumble on, carrying you to the end."

Mrs Petrie had very slightly cowered under the torrent of his words; but when he stopped she braced herself again, and assumed once more the odd, ill-fitting attitude of truculence. "Indeed," she said; and again, "Oh, *indeed*. I am sure I can see nothing to be so agitated about if a girl of Cynthia's disposition and affectionate temperament feels a perfectly natural consideration and love for her mother. If this has prevailed in the face of—of influences to the contrary—well, so much the more ought it to be respected. Theatrical words and gestures on *your* part, my dear Charles, cannot in any way alter the facts of human nature—not even in your daughter—however much they may relieve your feelings."

"Pooh! . . . 'Theatrical gestures' indeed!" Petrie exploded. "That is the worst of teaching catchwords to unimaginative people . . . to people who think that the only possible evidence of tragedy is *blood*—spirting, squirting, sticky red blood. . . . But what about the tragedy of *souls*? . . . The miserable, battered, bent and broken souls adrift in this absurd world, where it is the lot of the strong to strengthen the weak, and the cankerous habit of the weak to weaken the strong. . . . Yes, even in this futile, guinea-grabbing Pelchester—souls gaping and drawn bloodless by parasites with neither blood nor stomach of their own. But you cannot see the tragedy of *that*; and just because there is no oozing of vulgar hæmoglobin for you to fasten your eyes upon . . ."

He stopped, breathless.

Now Mrs Petrie had possessed, in days gone by, a most astonishing quality, a very charming trick. It was the very simple device of meeting vehemence quite coldly, of making a show of quiet dignity—miniature, but perfect and tremendous—and by lighting upon a phrase that hit the nail, by the most casual and unconscious fluke, right upon its head.

She was agitated now by the breathless excitement of Petrie as he strained forward, like a caged animal behind the bars

of the bed-rail. But she shrugged her shoulders at him with an air approaching jauntiness, a jauntiness made ludicrous by the little lace cap awry upon her untidy head and by the threadbare shawl upon her shoulders.

"You are too overpowering, Charles, with your flow of crude, alliterative adjectives," she said. The boredom and hauteur she displayed were no less than a miracle. "More words that you have taught me, you see. But that particular group—'battered, bent and broken'—struck me as worn out quite twenty years ago. It struck me—even *then*—as almost meaningless in its extravagance."

The moment, however, that she had said the words she would have given anything in the world to have them back again, unsaid; for Petrie's eyes were fixed upon her.

The pallor of his face was strangely dark against the square of light on the faded window-blind. Blacker than his hair and his frayed cravat gleamed his eyes.

Through her they pierced, looking across the gulf of years at a laughing youth seated carelessly over a little table under the awning of a quiet café, and at the slip of a girl who sat with him, laughing merrily at his flow of 'crude, alliterative adjectives,' stopping the flow only that he might gaze at her, astonished and charmed by some such pert and surprising insolence as this. . . .

His eyes came slowly back from this picture to the weak little woman among the bed-clothes before him, to the parchment-like skin, and pale lips that curled in bitterness and reproach upon him. He continued, quietly staring at the woman who could speak to him thus with a superb nonchalance, and yet had failed—failed persistently—to cast her bread, with the least show of decent courage, upon the waters. . . .

She had now attacked him as an artist, and had poured cold scorn upon him. She had exposed his technique, and sought, thereby, to bring discredit upon the greatness of his work. Once, many years before, some obscure individual had done the same thing to him in the columns of the *Morning Post*. He had never done it a second time. (Petrie had managed to get a few minutes' talk with him at his house in Turnham Green.)

Mrs Petrie looked up to see him tumble at last into the chaos of fury and resentment over which he had been so precariously suspended. Her jaunty bravado vanished; the shoulders fell, the pointed little chin sank.

This seemed to be the moment she had expected and dreaded all her life.

She trembled terribly at the flashing of the cold, unblinking eyes fastened upon her. Under the bed-clothes she clutched her hands together; she moistened her lips to speak, to say anything at all to snap the awful tension of those moments wherein the two merely stared at each other—but the lips, still dry, could utter not a sound.

"Adjectives, did you say?" Petrie asked, with the smile that could twist his face to a shape more grotesque than anything normally human. "Well, you shall have adjectives—both old and new." He paused a while, as though choosing words and carefully weighing them. But the words he eventually used he need not have devoted much time to finding.

"Damn you!" he said simply at last, with no more passion, nor less devoutness, than a monk puts into his paternoster. "Look—look what you have done to *me*! And you knew not what you did—that, too, must go down against you. Blind, miserable vampire that you are, *look* at me—see the boneless, bloodless nincompoop you have made of me. And was there any blood spilt in the doing of it? . . . Devil a drop." In a funereal undertone he repeated, "No—devil a drop! You've had it all yourself, that's why."

Mrs Petrie moved uneasily, avoiding his stare. She hated things to be put in a coarse way. "C-Charles!" she appealed, weakly.

"Yes," Petrie snapped. "That's just it—that infernal way of yours of saying 'Charles.' You are not yet forty-five years old—you are still a young woman as I am a young man—and for the last twenty you have been a miserable, whining hag. . . . 'Charles'!" He mocked her appealing tone. "Bah! just listen to the coarse devices of talk you drive me to—*me* to whom sound is potential music! To think that anyone should drive *me* to lay my tongue to vulgar recrimina-

tion and abuse—abuse of a woman as frail as a rabbit. *I*, with the brains of a Titan and the imagination of the Muses. . . ."

Mrs Petrie trembled. A leg of the rickety bed slipped off the empty cotton reel that for years had done duty for the missing castor. Petrie did not heed it.

The jerk merely snapped his teeth together and tossed a lock of hair wildly over his forehead. His chest heaved with the scurrying breaths he drew, his nostrils quivered.

A new and terrible dread had begun to grow upon Mrs Petrie. The sheer brag of his last sentence made panic of her fear; for no man—not even Petrie—in his senses would be likely thus to describe himself in conversation.

"Charles!" she tried to scream, but the word only rattled in a hollow whisper.

"Charles!" he mocked again. "Ye gods! . . . You weak ones! but it is a mighty thing that weakness of yours. You need only to collapse upon one's neck and the trick is done—provided you keep on saying your 'Charles!' at the proper intervals. Nothing is sacred from you. Neither work nor rest; neither music, nor noise, nor silence. There you stick, insatiable and always empty, whispering or whining, crooning or screaming your 'Charles.' . . . Always asking, claiming, seeking, demanding—God only knows what! If one is silent, you ask for one's thoughts. If one has no thoughts, you suspect deceit and treachery. . . . That is what you did to me. You pestered and exasperated me, and when I was fordone—exhausted and empty from the sheer drainage of it all—there was nothing for your weariness. Then your eyes began to grow round with fear and quaking apprehension. You dogged and haunted all my efforts—and my lapses from effort—my working and my resting, with your doddering, futile dread of 'failure.'"

She listened to him, shrinking.

"*Failure* indeed!" he snapped. "And why on earth shouldn't I have failed? Who were you to dictate success to me, if I preferred decent failure? . . ." She took a little heart as his tone became more quiet. "But *no*," he went on. "There was always that hollow, haggard, haunting, hectic—'Charles.' God! How I used to wish that they

had named me Nero or Napoleon—anything, *anything* in the whole wide world but Charles. Artaxerxes would have done admirably. . . ." She looked restlessly about the room, pressing her hands together upon a crumpled corner of the bed-sheet. Petrie suddenly recalled her by shaking the bed.

"Listen to me!" he said sharply. "Attend—if you still have the power to attend to *any*thing!"

Unwillingly, but meekly, her eyes drifted back to his. "You are not to do it to Cynthia. You are to leave Cynthia alone. First of all, you must realise that you are not *ill*—to require the servitude of a buxom young woman with brains far beyond those of a scullery-wench and chambermaid. . . . Mrs Simpson can minister to all your wants, as she can minister to mine. But you must let even Mrs Simpson *live*. . . . You have begun to say 'Cynthia' just as you used, till I actually buried myself out of earshot of you, to say 'Charles.' I have heard you doing it. You torment her with your futile anxieties just as for years you tormented me—bursting in upon her thoughts, violating the sanctity of her silences. . . . And what *are* your anxieties, now that you have actually more money than you can spend without effort? . . . They are pots and pans now, your precious anxieties, and—and dish-towels and other laundry problems. That is the kind of refuse you keep slinging into the dreams of an artist! But it is *finished*. There is going to be no more of it, do you hear?"

She looked helplessly at him, while he repeated, "*No more*. She is going away to get out of it: to *live*. She is going to work and to play—play the piano, and play the fool if the spirit so moves her. And you are not to follow her. You are to stay *here*. I myself will take care of you."

She shivered.

"And mind you," he added sternly, "not a word of this to Cynthia."

Mrs Petrie saw exactly how much of truth there was in all he had said to her, and she trembled. She saw, too, his wild exaggerations, and she tried, on the strength of these, to look up at the angular form that towered above her. "Brute!" she managed to say. "H-heartless brute!"

"Brute?" Petrie repeated, and moved, like a doctor, to

the side of the bed. "Oh, no! Not that, Elizabeth. Executioner, if you like—referee—and possibly executioner."

With that he pulled his pipe out of his pocket and stalked, still looking at her, out of the room.

Mrs Petrie remained sitting up, looking at the brass knob of the bed-post, and thinking.

She sought to quench her thirst with a cup of tepid tea squeezed from the pot on the tray, but the thirst was not to be quenched. The strain had exhausted her, so she pushed the tray as far as it would go upon the bed, and lay back among the pillows.

The absurdity of his remarks upon the name of Nero caused her to smile, a slightly contemptuous smile, and then the absurdity of his boasting claims, added to this other absurdity, caused the smile to freeze upon her features.

The fervour—the frenzy almost—with which he laid claim to Brains and Imagination frightened her, so that his parting word was the only word that could frighten her more.

Whatever the processes within her might have been that determined it, a cold acceptance of the facts eventually crystallised out of them. The facts were that Cynthia would go to Holzgarten and become, for good or ill, a musician.

Another fact was—and this she realised with her pointed little chin thrust slightly forward—that 'they should see.'

They should see whether she was weak and useless and rotten, or whether she could run a house with greater economy and precision than the girls had ever run it.

So she got up and dressed herself, to face lunch with Cynthia—brave and defiant, and astonishingly cheerful.

. . . . . .

Petrie went up to his bedroom for the portmanteau that was already packed. He left a note on the study desk for Cynthia, saying that he had been urgently called away to London for a day or two. Then, taking a couple of bank-notes out of the bottom drawer, and a bundle of paper, about an inch thick, out of the top drawer, he let himself out of the garden door and hurried to the station.

. . . . . .

§ 3

Early in the autumn Cynthia, with a small new trunk and a large suit-case, set out for Holzgarten.

Mrs Petrie, dry-eyed and smiling, gave her a brave God-speed at the gate where the cab was waiting. Petrie, filling the cab with smoke, took her to catch the eleven o'clock up train.

For the fourth time since the spring he had business that took him to London.

End of Book I

Book Two: Chapter One

§ 1

THREE years and two months had passed when Cynthia thrust her head out of a railway carriage window as the train drew in to Pelchester.

She immediately drew it in and sat down with a bump. "Well—I never," she exclaimed.

She was ready for surprise, but not for the particular surprise the platform held for her—a perfectly ordinary family group, of Petrie, Mrs Petrie, and Freda, standing close together, engaged in a common quest.

Apart from the fact that he stood thus in the bosom of his family, there was nothing astonishing in the appearance of Petrie. Save for that one thing, he might have been standing, just as she had left him thirty-eight months before, on that very same spot. The same old jacket with its bulging pockets hung from the broad, drooping shoulders; the same shiny trousers sagged at his knees. His pipe was still out.

Mrs Petrie, on the other hand, was, quite apart from her context, astonishing. Her attitude was more than merely erect. It had that touch of exaggeration which is usually described as 'soldierly'—that slightly theatrical quality which suggests that the spirit is stronger than the flesh. She wore a new coat and skirt, and a prim little black hat with a bunch of large red cherries. She was, in a word, not the same woman.

Freda, too, had changed. In her dress, and in the style with which she carried her bag and umbrella, she rose to the occasion of having left far behind her the uncomfortable 'where the brook and river meet' status.

When she had kissed them all, Cynthia said, "Oh, *do* let's walk home, it looks so lovely—unless mother is tired."

"No, dear, thank you," said Mrs Petrie crisply. "I am not the least bit tired. I would prefer to walk."

There was just enough of defiance in her tone to make Cynthia think that it would always be a little out of place to ask that type of question in future.

Conrad met them not far from the house, and hailed Cynthia cheerily as Mrs Beethoven.

When, about three hours later, Cynthia saw that Mrs Simpson was laying five places for tea instead of four, she was beyond feeling surprise at anything. The meeting at the station, and the lunch, over which Petrie himself had presided, were a revelation to which it was quite impossible that anything fresh should be added; and so the spectacle of tea being laid for the complete family at the same board only confirmed her surprise. Yet she could not help saying, "Who's the fifth place for, Mrs Simpson?"

"The master, Miss," said Mrs Simpson. Cynthia stared at the tight knob of hair on the head of the woman who related miracles as though they were self-evident facts.

"Did he *say* he would have it in here, then?" she asked.

"Always does have it here, Miss," said Mrs Simpson. "Shall I wet it? The kettle *does* boil."

"Yes, do," said Cynthia, and went upstairs.

The Simpson occupation of the attics made it necessary for Cynthia to share her old bedroom with Freda. She found Freda doing her hair.

"You *are* a funny thing, Free!" she said. "Why ever didn't you write and tell me? Does he have *all* his meals in the dining-room?"

"Yes, rather," said Freda. "Good thing, too. It nearly *halves* the work. I thought mother would have told you—or he, if he ever writes. Besides, I didn't know how long it would last, till I'd got used to it, and sort of forgotten it. Didn't *they* mention it, then?"

"No," said Cynthia, "I had no idea. I wonder what could have possessed him. . . . Tell me, does it work?"

"Of course it works," said Freda, proudly managing to take some credit for the success. "Mother's *ever* so much better, you know. She still *fusses* about everything, of *course*—but not at meals. . . ."

"Yes, but is *he* any better?" asked Cynthia.

"H'm!" said Freda, "I didn't know that there'd ever been much the matter with *his* state of health. . . . No, he doesn't seem to be any different. He and the boy seem to get on very well together, without noticing anybody else much. They spend all the time arguing about nothing at all. It's a bit tiresome at times, but it's a good deal better than having to think of an extra tray every blessed time."

Cynthia wondered what, exactly, could be at the bottom of it all; and she wondered, too, why it should so astonish her, since she might have gathered from their letters that things, vaguely, were getting better at home—that everyone seemed to be becoming more sensible, a little more like other people.

Freda said, "There seems to be a good deal more money flying about from somewhere. *I* always thought we were as poor as Job's turkey. Where does it all come from, Cynthia? You must have cost a good bit, but there seems to be more than ever."

"Oh, I should think there's always been plenty, really," said Cynthia casually. "Only we haven't happened to know it till we took over the housekeeping. . . . I suppose mother manages by staying upstairs a good deal?"

"Not she," said Freda. "Whatever should she stay upstairs for? She is well now, you see."

It was incomprehensible, but it was wonderful.

Petrie sat calmly at the head of his table, and consumed hot muffins in amiable competition with Conrad.

From him Cynthia stole a glance at her mother. If Petrie surprised her, Mrs Petrie utterly baffled; for the only thing about Petrie was that he was in a new place. Himself, he was quite unchanged—the same old lounging figure of the study, except for a few, almost negligible, streaks of silver about his temples.

So it was not, after all, her father that surprised her—it was his new setting; and the most astonishing feature of the setting was her new mother. . . .

'Soldierly' is, after all, the only word that suggests her bearing. It lacked all repose, and allowed none. At times she was like an athlete, quivering and tense, waiting for the pistol-shot that sets him bounding away. Once the pistol-

shot was heard—a muffled, meaning-charged sound from the kitchen—and she leapt to the door, and through it to the source of the sound.

It was no less than a marvel. . . .

She came back with a dish of new-buttered muffins.

Cynthia stole another glance at her. She tried to find something to say directly to her; and all she could find was, "How do you manage about supper, Mummy? I should never have thought it possible to get everyone together at the same time."

"Pardon me—dinner." It was Petrie that answered. "We *dine*, Cynthia. And what is more, I am a paragon of punctuality. Your brother, I may tell you, is a slight nuisance, for in the matter of interpreting clock-faces he is a born Artist with a big A. But your mother will support me in the assertion that *I* am a paragon of punctuality."

With a brisk nod and another of her new smiles Mrs Petrie did so.

Conrad, however, spoke. "Well, it must be fairly easy," he suggested calmly, "to be a paragon of punctuality when you have nothing to do, like the Governor, but wait on the spot, looking at the door-knob and waiting for the next grub-time."

No subject held their attention for long, and tea was soon finished. Cynthia did not know that it was in them all to enjoy a meal so thoroughly.

There were a hundred and one questions to be asked and answered, the questions that always beset the returned traveller—till Petrie's envelopment in a sudden cloud of smoke indicated that tea was over.

So her mother no longer objected to tobacco smoke. . . .

She looked about her—at the cretonnes and chintzes that had seemed, four years ago, so dismally faded. She looked at the old vases, festive now with the flowers that Conrad had gone out to get after breakfast, and at the set of Dickens. . . . Then she knew that the others were all looking at her. "Well—" she said awkwardly, and stood up; "so—I've come home."

She could not have thought of any remark more futile than that; but for an instant she caught her mother's eye, and

in that instant she saw what she had been looking for during the last four hours: Mrs Petrie's look of brittle alertness had vanished; she was smiling, not as she had smiled till now with a deliberate kind of smile, but faintly and a little wistfully.

"Yes, darling," she said softly. Her eyes twinkled upon them all. ". . . Loaded with honours."

What she did next was like the clicking of spurs together, though in point of fact she only reached across the little table for Conrad's plate and cup and saucer.

She said something about her "busiest time of day," and so indicated to Cynthia that she required no more attention from her.

Freda said she had to run round to "Fernlea," but supposed that Cynthia was too tired.

Conrad, who had never represented a social obligation of any sort to Cynthia, merely vanished.

So she was left alone, and drifted after Petrie to the study.

"Oh, so you've come to join me?" said he, waving her to the desk chair which he had drawn up to the fire—"in staring at the door-knob and waiting for dinner? . . . And how do you find the world fits you, Cyn, now that you have had time to try it on? D'you find it too big, or too small, or anything?"

"N-no," said Cynthia. "I think it's just about right. But I wonder what mother can find to absorb her at this time of day? . . ."

"I will tell you," said Petrie. "It's those little silver tea-knives. She cannot get Mrs Simpson to believe that water hot enough for the washing of dishes is also hot enough to dissolve the blades out of their green handles. As she never offers Mrs Simpson an opportunity of testing out the theory openly, and since, if Mrs Simpson has tested it out covertly, she dare not admit it, the case has not been proved to the satisfaction of either party. Your mother, therefore, goes into the kitchen every time those knives are used to stand them point downwards in a cocoa-tin that fits them like a glove, and to pour on water of the correct temperature till only the blades are covered by the cleansing liquid. As a matter of fact I very strongly suspect—and my suspicion is

supported by evidence from your astute brother—that all the blades have been washed, several times, out of the handles, and have been stuck in again quite satisfactorily with burnt sugar. But we digress from the *world*, Cynthia, as found by the rising generation of artists."

"Oh, *it's* alright," said Cynthia. "Only there's always been a great deal to do. I can't imagine how people like Grendel manage to get everything in. . . . Grendel's a perfect marvel. . . ."

"Grendel, I take it, is your genius of the moment?" asked Petrie.

"I should just say he *was*," said Cynthia. "He went back, as a matter of fact, two years ago—to Moscow. It won't be very long before we're hearing of *him* again. I've brought a copy of his prize quartette that I played in. He gave me one, you know. . . ."

"We will have a look at it sometime," said Petrie. "But, for the moment, we again digress. What about money, Cynthia? Was it enough?"

"Oh, yes," said Cynthia, "a little more than enough, as a matter of fact. I've managed to save forty pounds, including my singing prize, if . . . though Freda says there's heaps of it about here."

"The devil she does!" said Petrie, and chuckled. "Oh, no. We will manage without your savings, Cyn, I think."

"Chrissie did all the managing for us, you see," said Cynthia; "and she's a perfect marvel. She has been there for seventeen years, playing in the orchestra, and *ought* to know the ropes. She kept us on about fourpence a week."

"As guests?" asked Petrie, "or hosts?"

"Hosts, I should think, if anything," said Cynthia, "though there was no one really poor in the 'gang' after old Grendel went. We all helped to keep him going."

"Well," said Petrie, "and once again we digress. You are satisfied, apparently, with your share of money. The only other thing that is apt to complicate the Artist's existence is Sex. How do you find your share of sex suits you, Cynthia?"

Perhaps it was the companionship of the wonderful Christina Brookes that had educated Cynthia to the point of being not

the least disturbed by such a question; perhaps it was the fact that girls were no longer what they had been; perhaps it was Petrie's own particular manner of saying these things that led one to think of nothing but the answer. The question had, however, surprised Cynthia, so she was not in a position to make any answer offhand. It was as though she had not been in the habit of looking occasionally at her bank-book, and then, suddenly, been faced with the question about her allowance.

She hesitated, trying to form a rough estimate.

Petrie went on, "Of course, I've only been a man, so it is quite possible that I altogether over-estimate the importance of the thing. Also it is rather a futile subject, since no one can alter one's allowance of it, and no one tells the truth—but I must say I should like to know, purely for my own information and interest, whether you are satisfied with your allowance of sex."

"I don't know," said Cynthia; "it's very difficult to say, since I've never exactly noticed . . ."

"So I take it you are still what the great middle-class of this country would call 'heart-whole.' And that is very satisfactory. . . . I take it that you have had no more offers of marriage, then. . . ."

"No," said Cynthia. "At least—n-*no*. Not exactly. But there's a boy—a *man* I suppose really—only he's quite mad. You may have heard of him, he says he's played all over the world. He's Baradjik, the 'cellist. Roumanian, I should think."

"Good heavens!" said Petrie, "I've always wondered what becomes of infant prodigies when they grow up. So that's it, is it? And so you are partly in love with Baradjik the trick 'cellist! Does he still clothe himself in velvet raiment like Little Lord Fauntleroy?"

"Good gracious, no!" said Cynthia. "He's a great big thing—as tall as you, nearly. He's got *wonderful* hands, but I assure you I'm not the least bit in love with him, my dear. He's *mad*—that's all. . . . Chrissie says he ought to have his ears boxed. But everyone agrees he's mad."

"H'm," said Petrie; "I suppose—no; supposing's no use. I daresay your friend Chrissie gave you all the help

you required in that quarter. She's a paragon of wisdom, apparently. . . . But what of the frau landlady, and her disappointing, beer-gathering spouse ? "

" Oh, he died years ago," said Cynthia. " But Frau Masburg is the same as ever, I suppose—perfectly lovely. She's awfully full of you, Dad. . . . She says the one desire of her life is to see you again before her hair is *quite* grey. . . ."

" By Jove, yes," said Petrie, " she did have the most wonderful hair. . . . She must be a very good fifty-five now, Frau Masburg . . . And what about that stiff-shouldered youth ? You know the lugubrious individual I mean ; his father had the Post Office."

" Bluebeard ! " said Cynthia. " Herr Golanz ! Oh, he always asks after you too. He spends most of his time with us. He's been awfully good to us, always taking us all out and giving us treats. Of course he's the Director of the Post now. We call him the father of the gang. He sent you all the felicitations imaginable . . . and the Herr Dierzo —*Monsieur* Dierzo, I mean ; but *he* refused to send you any definite message. He said to tell you he couldn't think of doing such a thing until you had apologised for the insult . . ."

" Insult indeed ! " Petrie snorted. " I would certainly not think of apologising to the fellow. He *deserved* to be insulted. He simply drove me from Holzgarten by his stiff-necked obstinacy."

" Well," said Cynthia, " that is not his account of the affair. He said, though, that I might mention to you that in his opinion, *I* might get somewhere, *some* day, because I am willing to learn from my betters, where you were not even willing to listen. . . ."

" Just like his confounded impudence ! " said Petrie. " Absurd old bandmaster that he is—yes, and all the rest of them too. That's all they're fit for, Cynthia—to shout their nonsensical pedantry at soldiers, instead of trying to talk on an equality with *artists*. I say—you don't mean to tell me that you didn't shout back at him ? You don't swallow all the nonsense he talks and plays, do you ? "

Cynthia said very suavely, " I managed to get the Gold Medal all the same."

"H'm," said Petrie. ". . . Poor old Dierzo, he was inclined to be a hide-bound old fossil then, thirty years ago, very nearly. I can't imagine what he must be like now. D'you know, Cyn, I've been horribly tempted to run over and see them all again, before they take it into their heads to admit the facts by quietly dying. . . . Poor old Dierzo! is there any talk of his 'Odysseus' now?"

"Oh, yes, rather," said Cynthia. "He's still at the third act. But I say, dad—why ever *didn't* you come to see us?"

"Because I've been so busy, Cyn." He said this in a strangely hushed voice, as though it were in the nature of a confession. "But I shall go one of these days. I would like to see them all. I'm interested in people, you know, Cyn, frightfully interested. That's what we agreed to call 'the beauty of function,' you may remember. . . ."

"I remember *you* agreed something of the kind," said Cynthia. "But I was thinking of something else at the time . . . poor old daddy!"

"The spectacle of that fidgeting young Golanz, grown, presumably, to beard-hood, directing the local Post and fathering that gang of yours, does, I must say, attract me tremendously. . . ."

So they talked on, about the people who were still left that had known Petrie twenty-eight years ago, and of the 'gang' and the catch-words that distinguished it from every other coterie that ever had existed, or was ever likely to exist, in the world of Music and the universe of Art.

Then Petrie suddenly said, "Yes, Cynthia—I believe you have got it after all, you youngsters with your talk of 'melody' and the importance of your 'lyrical quality,' whatever you may mean by these things—and whether even you have the vaguest idea in the world of what you do mean. . . . But stick you to it, my girl, for that is Life, as big as one can ever spell it! Keep on *making*, Cynthia, making, making—all the time, *making*. Leave mere doing—the shifting of things from one place to another place—to the world's great Pelchestrians and natural coolies. Yes, confound their flat, ugly faces and their broad, hairy hands—they have no time for life, except the few odd moments left over to them after the

scramble and hurry of living. But, for *us* it's got to be *Life* itself—*making*, with our own hands and brains. . . . Eh, Cyn ? "

It was funny of him to appeal directly to her in that way. She could, otherwise, have ignored the pause.

His eyes lighted up with memories—of the days when Frau Masburg's hair was a mass of spun gold that could tumble to her waist, and when Bluebeard was an awkward youth who feared his father like the Mogul Emperor. . . .

She noticed the lines around his mouth and eyes, the grey in his hair. The sheer leanness of him gave her a hurt. She had never been sorry for him before, as he had now made her sorry, by talking so joyfully of the joys in which he had no share.

" My poor old daddy," she said softly, " I—I should think it must be very lonely for you at times. . . . Why don't you—you ought——"

Petrie interrupted her. Again he behaved curiously, as though he were confiding a secret to her.

" I," he said, " am very well, thank you, Cyn—very well, indeed, I assure you."

" Yes, I daresay," said she ; " but I don't suppose you ever sound a note. . . . It's all very well to *talk* the way you do about the life for you and me and all that kind of thing. I'm all right enough ; but there's nothing that you do. There isn't much of *making* anything about you." She hated saying that, but she felt that it had to be said.

" My dear girl," Petrie said quietly, " the one thing about you musician people that has always struck me as your most unintelligent trait is that you won't realise that there is anything other than *sound* in the world at all worthy of consideration. But do let me assure you that you are quite wrong. There are other things besides sound for an artist to spend his time contemplating and sifting and rearranging. . . . There is a host of artists other than mere sound-collectors, you know. . . . In a word, Cynthia, I—er—well, I too live ; also I might call attention to the fact that I have been taking care of your mother ! I daresay you have commented on the way we all take our food in common now. The experiment

has proved most successful: in a moment you will hear a bell. I shall then proceed forthwith to wash my hands, and you yours. When, five minutes later, we hear another bell we will all meet together and cheerfully eat. I say 'all,' but I must explain that your brother is excepted—for his only laws are dignity and scorn. That double bell idea is a splendid device which I stole from the old bootshop. . . ."

He was interrupted by the tinkle of a bell which Mrs Simpson rang in the hall. Petrie smiled and said, "That is the way *esprit de corps* is made, Cynthia. Simple, isn't it? . . . After dinner, by the way, I should take your mother round to see Sylvia, and make the acquaintance of your seemingly pneumatic nephew, my grandson, George Charles Tuke."

Cynthia remained sitting when he got up. "I don't need to wash," she said, "I'm quite ready. But why did you never come to see us?"

"Because, as I told you," said he, "I was too busy. Furthermore, you were too busy. But I am going. . . . Let's see. . . . Five weeks to Christmas. . . . Hang it, Cynthia! I'll go next week and see those old duffers. Next week will suit me splendidly, and you will be able to devote the time most profitably to getting to know your family. . . ."

It had never so much as occurred to her during those three years that Petrie could have been prevailed upon to pay a visit to Holzgarten. She wished some one could have had the sense to suggest it to her. "But, father . . ." she began.

"Never a but," said he. "I've got to see those old Johnnies again. The sooner the better; they might die off any winter now."

. . . . . .

§ 2

Cynthia returned thereafter to the enigma of her mother. No one could throw any light upon it for her, since no one seemed to see that an enigma existed.

It was from Conrad that she expected most, but Conrad only said, "Rot, she's as fit as a fiddle. She just goes round, turfing everything up like a jolly old hen—but it's keeping

her up absolutely at the tip-top of her form. It's worth a guinea a box to her, old girl. And as for *you*—good Lord, the way she brags about you to the Spiers dame and Gaffer Harbottle. . . . Well, it makes me feel a perfect idiot at times, positively ashamed of the lot of you. I expect it's the presence of the Governor at grub that's really stuck in your throat, only you don't know it. It stuck in mine, *I* can tell you, till he began to show that he's quite a sportsman at heart."

She watched Conrad as he spoke, and noticed the new Adam's-apple that bobbed up and down in his throat over a dignified and very hard collar. . . .

And so in three years they had all grown tremendously; it was only she—the one that ought to have changed the most—that had changed not at all.

Chapter Two

OLD DIERZO sat by the great tiled stove in the 'Leyscherhof' one frosty morning in December, waiting.

If there is one achievement in which the Gaul, and likewise the Teuton, excel all other men, and in which the Gaul or Teuton artist excels all other Teutons and Gauls, it is in the art of sitting at complete ease upon any absurd chair.

The Anglo-Saxon has devised for his leisured youth a seat of woven rushes and bright upholstery—a seat as broad as a railway carriage and as long as a coffin. Given this and a few loose, fat cushions, your Englishman can become the most comfortable man you could hope to see anywhere.

Dierzo had at his disposal nothing but a bent-wood chair about ten inches in diameter and a little marble-topped table, yet never did a flannelled undergraduate, with the longest Minty contrivance and all the cushions in the world, succeed in looking more thoroughly at ease than Dierzo.

His elbows rested on the table and supported his ample torso, which floated with a 'lighter-than-air' elegance above a tall cylinder of pale, sparkling beer. His stick and hat lay on a chair beside him, and the silvery locks of hair about his temples moved among the fingers of one hand.

The expression upon his face, however, gave some doubt as to the completeness of his composure. He frowned from time to time and pursed up his lips, unpursing them again only for the purpose of drinking his beer.

Another figure passed by the window that gave on to the rough, cobbled street, and Dierzo sighed a sigh of great relief.

"Come along, Sturmer," he said, moving his hat and stick to another chair. "Sit down, my friend. You must wait and see him too. I would like it—and he will be glad to speak to you of his daughter. . . ."

"But I am to talk with him to-morrow," said Sturmer.

"Perhaps this would be intrusion." He sat down facing the window.

"Indeed no," Dierzo insisted, and held up two fingers to the waiter. "No. It is most fitting that we should talk with him together. . . . Sturmer, I will tell you the truth of the matter; I am uneasy. He has apologised now, through his daughter to me—apologised most amply. And now I see how perfectly true it was, everything he said to me."

Sturmer took a draught of beer and then said, "Bah! my dear Dierzo. The insolence of these hysterical boys! and *you* to be agitated by such a thing at *your* time of life, and after all these years! Fie!"

Dierzo only wagged his head. "No," he said. "The boy was right, I tell you. Insolent, if you will—but, nevertheless, right. The thing he had the impertinence to bring me as a composition was unmusical and *wrong*. The whole idea was wrong, and I told him so with appropriate anger. 'Herr Dierzo,' he said, well aware that my correct designation is 'Monsieur,' 'you are only a milestone, after all is said and done. The moss already grows upon you. You are very well, in your *place*, to indicate the distance covered upon the road, but you make the error of thinking that you are the journey's end. You will do no more,' he said to me. 'In thirty years if I come to you and say, What have you done? you will only be able to point in answer to your watch-chain, that shall have moved a little further forward from your spine, and say, "I—er—I have grown a little stouter, and become dyspeptic."' He has apologised for it all now, confound his insolence—but it was true. Sturmer, I have done nothing. Beyond the 'Odysseus,' which is not yet *quite* completed, I have done nothing."

"Bah!" said Sturmer again. "And what has *he* done in thirty years that you should be afraid of him? Have you so much as *heard* of him?"

"No," said Dierzo. "Since he so foolishly went away from Ganz at the St George's Hall, London, I have not heard of him. It is true that he too has done nothing but send us this daughter of his. I, nevertheless, have grown a trifle stouter. I am not, thank God, dyspeptic, but he might see

that I am stouter. . . . You, dear friend, have sent many great ones into the world—the Sebasté, Peliti, and many, many others. I have sent none. Petrie disappointed me, with his insolence and his stiff neck. Grendel, in years to come, will attain mediocre fame, *perhaps*. . . ."

"Hush!" said Sturmer, with a gesture.

This turn to the conversation was merely the fulfilment of an ancient rite, a rite performed solemnly in every vacation under the awning of the Leyscherhof, or by the great tiled stove. "Hush!" said he again. "Did you not send forth Galph, and Limber, and that other Englishman before Petrie's day—Monicombe? Who are we to say that they are mediocre? We are not posterity yet—no, not by many a day." Suddenly he started up in his chair. "Great Heavens!" he exclaimed. "Surely there was never so long a man as that one yonder. He is assuredly two metres from his hat to his heels. Look!"

The man in question was stooping in the doorway, and stood smiling at them. Then he pulled the hat off his head and advanced upon them, his hand outstretched.

"Maestro," he said to Dierzo, "so you have forgotten a pupil, and it was a boast of yours that you never did. You too, Doctor, have forgotten me. . . ."

"It is the boy Petrie himself, as I am alive," said Dierzo, shaking him by the hand. "No, indeed, I have forgotten no pupil of mine. My pupil was a swaggering, good-for-nothing lad, and it was for *him* that I was looking. This is a man we never knew. . . . Why, Herr Petrie, you are an old man—one of ourselves now, eh, Sturmer? Look at the silver upon his temples. . . . So, so, so, but we must indeed be getting old. . . ."

"Old!" said Petrie, "as though you two could *ever* get old. You are not one day older. . . . But you seem to have forgotten, Maestro, that the old hatchet is buried. It was never '*Herr*' Petrie in the old days. It was just 'Englishman.' . . ."

"Well, *Englishman*, then," said Dierzo, and became immediately unctuous, showing that what was about to follow was ceremonial. He took Petrie's hand again and continued,

"You have most liberally apologised for certain rude words you once spoke to me. In so far as the apology referred to your rudeness, I have accepted it; but the remainder of the apology I now ask you to take back. Before we may drink a glass of blonde beer together I insist that you take it back. The words you spoke were *true*. They were a prophesy."

Petrie shook the old hand that rested in his, a hand that would have been conspicuous among a million others. He felt—to put his feelings briefly—an ass.

"Nonsense, my dear sir," he stammered. "Nonsense—I mean to say—perfect rot, you know—n-nothing of the kind."

"But *yes*," insisted Dierzo, not to be cheated of his ceremonial. "*True*, I say. In thirty years I have done *nothing*."

"On the contrary," said Petrie, "in thirty years you have contrived not to age by a single day. And *that*, sir, is work worthy of *any* artist."

Honour was satisfied.

They sat down again to their table, now freshly adorned with beer.

"It was a wonderfully true saying," Dierzo said. "We *are* only milestones—all we artists. . . . But tell us now, my boy, what mile is it that *you* register—for I know that in thirty years you will have been carried far along the hard, long, endless road."

Petrie was again feeling awkward, and the awkwardness again made its main attack upon the muscles of his throat. "I—er—well, as a matter of fact, I gave up music completely some years ago because I had to. Of recent years I have—er—I must ask you, by the way, to treat this confidence as most strictly confidential. I—I began to follow a—another art in short. I did not mean to tell this to anyone in the world. . . . But there you are . . . damn it! you have persisted in expecting something of me all these years, and—well, I am Harold J. Rockleigh now, of whom you may or may not have heard. There you have it—and, *please*, not a word of it to a single living soul. . . ."

Sturmer and Dierzo were both perplexed and frowning, and mumbling "Rockleigh? . . . Rockleigh? . . ."

The confession that had cost Petrie so much meant nothing

whatever to them. He stopped, nervously twiddling his cane and tracing with his thumb-nail an irregular design upon the film of mist that covered his glass. Instead, he threw back his head and laughed. "And *that*," said he in great delight, "is *fame*. Never mind though; I am something of a milestone in this art of mine. In London I have some fame; and in six months' time I hope to have a great deal more. . . . All I'm really trying to assure you, for some obscure reason, is that I am, after all, 'making good.'" He stopped, smiling at this analysis. "I might just as well be a twenty-year-old Yankee, with my anxiety to make that clear to you, instead of an aging philosopher!"

"Ah, yes, yes, yes," said Dierzo. "But why, my friend, why did you give up music like that? You were a born musician. I told you so, if only . . ."

"I know," said Petrie. "You told me all kinds of things, a great many of which were, I think, true. But you tried also to convince me that my stuff was bad, and it never was bad. It was only eccentric. If you had convinced me of *that*, and of the economic fallacy of trying to sell eccentric music, as of trying to sell boots—perfectly *good* boots, mark you—which just don't happen to fit your fellow-citizens, I daresay I might have had the sense to do thirty years ago what I began to do *four* years ago."

"But, my dear boy," said Dierzo sadly, "how long did you strive? What artist ever prevailed without persevering?"

"H'm," said Petrie. "And how long did John the Baptist strive? Just about long enough to make a widow of Mrs J. B."

"Ah!" said Dierzo. "Of course. I had forgotten. You married."

A hush fell upon the company, punctuated only by a sound of "Tch . . . Tch . . . Tch . . ." from Dierzo, and jerky, reflective little shakes of his head. Petrie appeared to enjoy the situation, for he smiled at the sunlight through his beer, while Sturmer looked about him helplessly, lugubriously.

"Please," said Petrie again, to break the spell of awe that had fallen upon the two old bachelors, "don't forget that what I have told you is a secret. It is very easy to let things

out, you know. That is why I have never told anyone before. . . ."

"But why?" said Dierzo, with an impatient gesture at the waiter.

"Well," said Petrie, "I have very sound reasons. But they are mostly private ones concerning the Philosophy of Labour. I do not think they would interest you particularly. You would also think I was talking through my hat if I tried to explain. That is the worst of my philosophy: I seem to be the only person in the world who appears to understand it. . . . You two have always lived alone, you see, and are supported by the State to continue in your quiet ways of life. You would not easily understand a man's motive in keeping a thing private — *strictly* to himself. The psychology of 'Secret Bread' is a thing that has never come your way. . . . Intrusion that is accidental is merely a nuisance; it never did any harm beyond merely suspending one's functioning. But deliberate intrusion is, believe me, the very devil. . . . But there, I see that my narrative has already 'lost suspense'; you have begun to fear that I am talking nonsense. I really came to discuss my daughter with you. I want to ask your advice: you first, Herr Sturmer, if you don't mind. What about her singing?"

Sturmer looked very wise and very consequential, but he looked, also, very much cornered. He fixed his eyes on Dierzo, who fixed his upon his glass.

Petrie would give him no help. At length Sturmer cleared his throat and said, "Your daughter, sir, has a superb voice. Not only is it a superb voice, but it is also a voice of unusual compass. . . ."

"M'yes," said Petrie, mimicking his consequential, even tones; "she is also an accomplished musician. But . . ." he added with a laugh that put Sturmer at his ease; "and it is the 'but,' I assure you, that I am most interested in. All I aim at doing is to assist Cynthia in making reasonably sensible plans."

"Then," said Sturmer, "I will tell you. Your daughter, sir, is *not* a singer. I will be frank with you, as a brother-artist—since you assure us that you, too, are an artist. Your

daughter has been a very great disappointment to me—only Dierzo knows how sad a disappointment. I said at first to him, 'Dierzo,' I said, 'I have another Sebasté here; but, and furthermore, she is a Sebasté who also has some good music in her.' Then in a year's time I must go again to Dierzo and say, 'No, my friend, she has not got it. She is no Sebasté.' . . . She has the most wonderful vocal organs in the world, she has also great music, as even Dierzo knows, and we and our colleagues awarded her the prize, but—but—she has not *It*."

"And what in thunder," asked Petrie quietly, "might you mean by *It*?"

"*It*," Sturmer merely repeated, a little irritated by the question. In explanation he moved his hands above his beer, working some imaginary, plastic substance, into an expressive shape. "It. . . . Temperament. . . . What you will. . . . She has not *got* it. She is dumb. Dumb as a lovely violin, a violin with all its possibilities. She can play upon her superb larynx and that wonderfully domed palate of hers, as upon a dead instrument. But she *can* not—she *will* not sing."

"I see," said Petrie. "I see, perfectly. It would take too long, however, to explain to you what you mean by 'temperament.' We'll agree that she lacks *It*. And I cannot say that I am altogether sorry. I never could *myself* work up a complete sympathy with the act of singing. I have always felt a little bit ashamed on behalf of singers. Personally, I would sooner be taken out and shot in perfectly cold blood than made to stand upon a platform and sing—even if I had the throat of Philomel herself. This 'It' you speak of, Maestro, is the mental constitution—the psychic shamelessness, so to speak—that makes it possible for some people to perform acrobatic feats in a complete state of nakedness. . . . And so, what you call a lack of *It*, my friend, is merely my daughter's insistence, possibly mistaken, upon spiritual and emotional tights. . . ."

Sturmer stared at him, while Dierzo banged his fist upon the table and rocked with laughter. "Bravo, Englishman!" he gurgled. "Bravo! My poor old Sturmer! It has made me ten years younger to hear that said to you. . . ."

"Then," said Sturmer, with tremendous dignity emptying his glass and rising to his feet, "lest I bring about the calamity of wheedling you *completely* back to your second childhood, I will leave you to enjoy the society of your friend. . . ."

"My dear sir," said Petrie, "*please* do not go away like that. The truth is almost within our grasp. . . . That figure of speech I used can be paraphrased into the perfectly inoffensive and current phrase, to the effect that my daughter will not 'let herself go' sufficiently to sing. . . ."

"Hungh!" was all Sturmer said, and slapped his hat upon his head in emphatic denial of a possible suggestion that he was taking it off. "Adieu."

"Which is, being interpreted," said Petrie musingly, "'to God.'"

"Ah, but please take no notice of Sturmer," said the surviving representative of the Grand Conservatoire. "I will make it all well with Sturmer. He is getting old, I fear; we have all noticed it. There once was a silence of three years between me and Sturmer, over the question of a tied semiquaver. Poor Sturmer!"

"I ought to be able to get through all I have to say to you in half an hour," said Petrie. "I hope I shall succeed in passing that time without offending you, Maestro. In case, however, that mishaps *should* occur, please accept my unreserved apology for anything I might chance to say in the nature of an unfortunate remark. . . ."

"Pray do not mention it," said Dierzo. "You must forgive Sturmer for his touchiness. At his time of life, you know. . . ."

"Quite," said Petrie, and filled and lighted his pipe. "Now, sir, let us get to business. The one thing in the world I am anxious to guard against at the moment is my daughter's becoming a chronic student. She has been with you three years, and anyone ought to be able to learn what *you*—er—what I mean to say is, that what *you* cannot teach a person in three years, that person is quite incapable of learning. All I am now concerned with is the turning of music into a profession for Cyn. My object in consulting you is precisely

the object certain fond parents have in view when consulting a phrenologist."

"Ah!" said Dierzo. "Oh. Indeed?"

"Yes," said Petrie. "For who can detect as well as you the significance of artistic bumps? Were you not right about me?" Petrie would have been hard put to it to explain his last question, which was merely tactical; but Dierzo did not ask for an explanation.

He threw himself heart and soul into the discussion that followed.

"Commerce, sir," Petrie declared as they proceeded, "I have decided, after many years of thought, is the only ballast of human life. Take away commerce and commercial aims, and ninety-nine per cent. of the living souls in the world would go bucketing about, keel uppermost. No, just as you, as a Master, have made an honourable profession out of your art, my daughter as an underling must make a decent business out of hers. She can have a small orchestra for the purpose—an orchestra financed by a friend, and she must be *independent*. With this orchestra of hers she shall *work*. Her very existence must depend on it. Commercial failure must be an unthinkable horror to her; she must recognise it as being the exact symbol of artistic failure. She shall be chained, so to speak, to her guns. . . ."

"And *that*," said Dierzo, "is your idea of independence! You have become a strange man, Petrie—a strange artist."

Petrie frowned at the interruption. Then he smiled and said, "Allow me to quote some doggerel to you:

'Stone walls do not a prison make' . . ."

"No, indeed," said Dierzo proudly. "Indeed not.

'Nor iron bars a cage.'"

"Quite so. But much more to the point is,

'If I have freedom in my love
And in my love am free' (just to eke out the syllables),
'Angels alone that soar above,
Enjoy such liberty.'"

And this, sir, applied to everyday life means, 'If only I can—

by hook or by crook; by means of a small orchestra; or by the dire threat of financial ruin—if only I can avoid making some personal relationship to some other individual my profession, and my *raison d'être*—there is still some little hope for me. The only slavery in the world, my dear Monsieur Dierzo, you whose thinking has seldom risen even to ledger-lines outside the usual ten, the only slavery in the world, I say, is incessant and exhausting companionship and inexorable spiritual demand. It exists potentially in every relationship—aunts and nieces, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters. . . . That, sir, is why I insist on your saying nothing of Harold Rockleigh. . . ."

Dierzo shook his head. "No," he said, slowly shaking his head. "She is too young yet—too immature for an orchestra. . . ."

"Well, she isn't likely to mature by becoming a hanger-on at seats of *learning*," snapped Petrie.

"She must *play*," said Dierzo. "She must have experience of ensemble work. There is plenty to be got in London, like I found for you with Ganz."

"And if you haven't hit the nail right on its head," said Petrie, "I will eat my hat. Of course, that's what she *must do*. . . . Now let us talk of *Music*. Forgive me for digressing so; but when I once see an opening for my Theory of Destructive Dependence, there's no holding me. I apologise. . . ."

"Not at all," said Dierzo. It was becoming very warm by the stove. Circumstances combined to make him drowsy. He mopped his forehead wearily, and Petrie thought, "Poor old fellow. He must be eighty if he is a day."

"I was thinking of what you have said," Dierzo continued. "It reminded me of my dear aunt that died in Strasburg. She embittered my early youth by saying merely, 'My dear Franz, what are you doing?' . . . Yes, truly that was a destructive companionship. It went very far towards keeping me an unmarried man. *Most* terribly did her words torment me when I was doing, in fact, nothing."

Chapter Three

§ 1

IT was with a shock that Cynthia one morning realised the amazing truth that she had been at home for three whole months.

It was now the end of February, and she would not even yet have noticed the passage of time had it not been for the arrival of a brown paper parcel and a letter from Grendel.

"My dear Miss Petrie," he wrote, "I am informed by people in Holzgarten that it is your intention to institute a small orchestra or quartette wherewith to perform smaller compositions. I am sending you, accordingly, some of my few small works of the past three years which might be suitable. I send them because you were kind enough to show an interest in my work, and in very grateful remembrance of the great assistance your wonderful playing was to me in my little Trio. (You will recognise the Trio, somewhat enlarged, in the suite I have called 'Despair.') Also, I hope by my small gift to convey to you my hearty congratulations on your own great triumph in winning both the Singing Prize and the Gold Medal for your Quartette.

"I sincerely trust that similar success may meet your efforts —present and to come.

"For myself, I am very comfortably situated with an adequate little orchestra, as you may have heard. I am at present engaged upon a small Opera, the libretto of which is being made by a poet friend of my youth. . . ."

Grendel! *There* was an *Artist* for you!

The letter gave Cynthia sudden cause to think. After two years he was able to send her a parcel containing "some of his few small works," weighing not less than two pounds. He was now engaged upon an Opera. It was easy enough to estimate, from that, how much Grendel accomplished in the

course of three months—at the same time earning his living, and his old mother's, with his 'adequate' little orchestra. . . . 'Adequate!' . . . The adjective made Cynthia smile; it was so typical of old Grendel's solemn earnestness. . . .

And what had she, Cynthia, done in three months? Not a single thing. Not an ounce, not the smallest fraction of an ounce—and that was the amazing part of it.

She had not even copied the quartette yet into the Album that Bluebeard had given her for her twenty-first birthday; and that, at least, she had intended, time after time, to do.

Three months had gone! . . . That was the bare fact of the matter.

But where? . . . How? . . .

She did not know. She tried to account for the wasted moments, but could account only for nine whole days that had not, in fact, been wasted. For these nine days she had spent, three with the Chills at Melton, and six with her mother shopping in London.

For the rest, the time had just leaked away.

She had been to one or two absurd tea-parties at Sylvia's, and one futile dance at the Town Hall, where she wished, not so much that she could dance well, as that nobody else bothered about it. Odd hours here and there, on the way to or from casual shopping expeditions (which were themselves, as a matter of fact, superfluous) had also been wasted at Sylvia's, playing with the bouncing nephew, gossiping to no purpose with Sylvia. . . . Or else she merely stayed at home.

And if she stayed at home, what did she do? Again, nothing whatever. Efforts to reduce Mrs Petrie's incessant busy-ness about the house seemed to swallow up a whole morning.

She would be consulted about the making of a pudding, the mending of a saucepan, the beating or the distribution of rugs, the question of whether the chimneys ought to be swept on Tuesday or whether they could be left till Tuesday week, when Simpson would have a holiday and be free to come and give a hand with getting things straight again after the departure of the sweep. Mrs Petrie would enter into these things with the intensity and zeal of one who is sounding the very Well of Truth at its ultimate source.

It amused Cynthia to see her mother thus, it pleased and astonished her. However certainly she might be sure, deep down, that they were talking utter nonsense, that such things did not really matter a fig one way or the other, she was always ready to listen, to give her advice.

Possibly a recipe would have to be copied out for Mrs Simpson, and Cynthia would copy it (though she could never, for the life of her, see why Mrs Simpson could not be given the print of the Cookery-book or the original newspaper-cutting to work from, like anybody else). But Mrs Petrie always preferred to have them copied into one of three books.

Perhaps curtains had to be changed, or laundry arranged; perhaps a forgotten item had to be fetched from the grocer's. It is true that Freda was always somewhere about the house; but Freda, too, was always busy. . . . At any rate, whether she could account for it, or whether she could not, lunch time always arrived to find Cynthia wondering how on earth it had come to be one o'clock so soon.

As the mornings had gone, so also went the afternoons. It is true that she had read a great deal, but she had read nothing that was of the least value to her—nothing that she could put down on the credit side of the account she was trying to render. Only two or three plays that Petrie had given her to look at had borne any serious thinking about or talking over with him, and these had been, on the whole, frivolous things and inclined to be silly.

Cynthia at last shrugged her shoulders. She could not see by what means she had wasted the time.

It was useless trying to understand what was beyond her understanding. The thing was a phenomenon, pure and incomprehensible. She could, however, say for certain that this state of affairs was going to end, and going to end abruptly.

She cut out the Russian stamps for Conrad, folded up the brown paper from Grendel's parcel, and rolled up the string for the cache of these things at the bottom of her mother's wardrobe. Then she looked carefully through the manuscripts for the suite which he had called "Despair."

Under the title was written, "To Miss Cynthia Petrie, in

grateful remembrance of her superb craftsmanship and unsparing pains. *Vita brevis, ars longa.*"

The irony of Grendel's inscription only set the seal, if seal were required, upon her resolution.

§ 2

By evening she had spent eight hours with her resolution, and when she went into the study she went excited, wondering what Petrie thought of her for the way she had behaved for three months after certain large talks of hers. . . . She was a little ashamed now of these talks; Petrie had remarked once that talking about Art was an art on its own account, with a technique all its own, and that it was all very well as long as one was not deceived into thinking that it was the art itself, about which it spent its time talking. . . .

"I say, dad," she said—"if you're not busy—what's this about an orchestra? You must have said something to them in Holzgarten about my having an orchestra." She felt that Petrie could have helped her, if he had wanted to. "It's the first *I've* heard about it. . . . And here I've wasted three months doing nothing." It had not, somehow, occurred to her before that Petrie had a share in the blame. It was quite obvious now.

"Oh, come now," said Petrie, "come, Cyn! Don't say you've been doing *nothing*. I was under the impression that you had been studying the *drama* during the afternoons—the drama as represented by our great new dramatists. . . ."

"Oh, dad, I do wish you wouldn't *fool about*—just now. It just makes me shudder to think of all these wasted weeks. I've had a letter and some music from Grendel—you know, the Russian in whose trio I played. He *is* so wonderful. He's doing so well, and *I* have done absolutely *nothing*." She looked at him in her despair.

"Well," said Petrie, "even if you have done nothing in the last three months, you have to-day done something extremely valuable. You have discovered that you are not, constitutionally, a parasite; in other words, that you are obliged by

your nature, to *work*. The fact that what you call 'working' the rest of the world quite deliberately calls 'playing' has nothing whatever to do with the issue. . . . If you feel you must do it—work, or play—you *must*. And that is all there is to be said about it."

"Oh, yes, I know!" Cynthia was impatient. "But the thing is to get *started*. I'm not going to waste any more time *thinking*. . . ."

"Oh, so you have been thinking then?"

"Well, yes—I've always assumed that I would try for an engagement to play somewhere—like Chrissie, you know, only something better, of course. And then this remark of Grendel's about an orchestra. . . . Whatever you said to Dierzo, when you were there—was it just one of your jokes, father?"

"Why a joke?" said Petrie. "Do you think it would be merely *jocular* for you to have an orchestra?"

"But where is it to come from?" asked Cynthia. "Who's got the money for an orchestra?"

"Oh, millions of people have got the money for millions of orchestras," said Petrie. "Don't worry about *that*. The only difficulty is to get them to give it up. . . . No, the money need not be a serious difficulty. The fact is, I myself—er, well, my profession has proved a great deal more lucrative than I ever expected, and your mother has great difficulty in spending money on anything but food and shelter. She could be *made* to spend more, of course, but there would be no point in it. It is a considerable art, you know, spending money without causing yourself any trouble in doing it. . . . Also, as a matter of fact, any business man would be willing to put money into a thing that he considered a 'business proposition.' Your orchestra would have to pay, of course. Do you think you could make an orchestra pay? What would you do with it?"

Cynthia shrugged her shoulders. "Now, *abroad*," she said, using just the tone for this word that immediately stirs up the Britishness and loyalty in even the faintest of patriots. "*Abroad*, people would go to *hear* a little orchestra."

Petrie for a few moments said nothing. Then, "Well, even in England—in Pelchester, in fact—if people were in

sufficient need of a cup of tea, I am sure they would not keep away from a tea-house because of the active presence there of a little orchestra. I notice, by the way, that you always qualify your orchestra as 'little.'"

"You mean play in a tea-house?" Cynthia showed signs of indignation. "Is *that* what you suggest?"

"I suggest nothing," said Petrie, "I merely record an observation on the British temperament. . . ."

"Well, what *do* you suggest that I should do with an orchestra, then?"

"Most amiable of amiable young women," said Petrie, "it is *your* career that is at the moment under discussion, not mine. If you think you can inveigle me into planning and financing a career and offering you the post of Conductor and General Manager, you are very much mistaken—you might, of course, inherit the career at my death, but even that is not my idea. You, Cynthia, are by nature an *individual*, I rather fancy, not a representative. . . ."

"I don't see why you should object to *helping* a little, all the same. . . ."

"And if you're going to get merely and unproductively peevish," said Petrie, "I shall insist on breaking off diplomatic relations with you forthwith. I *am* helping you, but I shan't do so to the extent of becoming *your* business manager and representative either. I flatter myself that I, too, am an individual."

Cynthia was still hot with indignation at the way she had been robbed of three months of precious time. She wished that Petrie would be a little less phlegmatic.

She said, "Well, suppose I started with a quartette, to do some chamber-music. . . . How much would that cost to run? To keep the people all the time, I mean, so as to get the work done properly. It would only mean three artists to be paid. . . ."

"In my time," said Petrie, "it was possible to buy a very fair artist, complete with instrument in good repair, for about sixty shillings per week. Artists with families ran to slightly more than that, but you need not go to the luxury of having families with your three. I am told artists have gone up a

trifle since those days; but I daresay four pounds would get you a very good one. . . ."

He would have continued talking, but Cynthia said quickly, "Three fours are twelve, then. Twelves into forty—three and something over. I've got forty pounds left of my own, you know, dad—I could keep it going for three weeks and a bit myself. . . . Goodness, one couldn't do very much in three weeks. . . ."

"And would you give your chamber-music here?" asked Petrie.

"Of course," said Cynthia. "Where else? I should think people would come."

Petrie was smiling. "If you can make it 'the thing' for them to do," he said, "you bet they'll come. You could get that fellow who came down to run the advertising for the bootshop some years ago— My hat! he was a genius! He convinced everyone here in no time that they were social pariahs if they bought anyone else's boots but Pudleigh & Walker's. We'll get hold of him, Cynthia. . . . It'd never be enough to tell our good fellow-citizens that a 'Concert will be given,' etcetera. Something must be done to show them that everyone else is going to a concert on a certain date. . . . Even then, you know, Cyn, you must be prepared for a let-down in this place. There are very few households in it that have been at all seriously inconvenienced during your infancy and childhood by the lack of chamber-music. Lord! it was hard enough to get them to buy the right *boots* at first. . . ."

But Cynthia was going beyond these details. "We must go through those things of Grendel's and see what we can find. . . . How on earth does one find a couple of decent violins and a 'cello?"

"That," said Petrie, "you will find the simplest thing in the world. You just have to whistle in a London newspaper, and they come—from Prague and Pimlico, Paris and Putney. The Pack is raised from Battersea to Buda-Pesth, from San Francisco to Shepherd's Bush. You can take a damp and ill-lighted room—there used to be one in Covent Garden—to listen to them. You'll find them all waiting for you,

Cynthia—*you*, I say, for I shall not be there. In my day it used to be with shirtless collars and sockless boots and empty stomachs that flapped about inside like sails in a calm. . . . Anyhow, they will *play* to you, so that you can choose your artists—*play*, did I say? I mean, they will *fight* upon their precious instruments, so that every note will be the snarl of a starving creature. . . . Perhaps it is all changed now, for we have started a new century. But, Lord! I've had to fight and outsnarl the poor starving wretches for a morsel of flesh. . . . It is a terrible place, Cynthia, that cellar in Covent Garden, and terrible fellows, those that used to be lured there by the chimera of their art. . . . But we digress. I merely intended to state that there is no dearth of quite efficient instrumentalists in the Metropolis who would be glad to accept an engagement at four pounds a week."

"Could we go up one day soon, and arrange it?" asked Cynthia.

"To-day," said Petrie, "is Thursday. You can send off your advertisement to-night, and we can go up on Monday. But you will conduct your audition, if you don't mind, alone. I might be tempted again to digress. I should feel constrained, I think, to deliver an address."

"D'you mean *next* Monday?" Cynthia exclaimed.

"Why not?" said Petrie.

. . . . . .

§ 3

On Monday afternoon Cynthia joined Petrie at one of the tea-tables in the Refreshment Room at Waterloo Station.

"It *was* pretty awful," she said. "Such absurd people came, people with no more idea of playing than flying. One was drunk already, and one shivering so much that he couldn't have played a note to save his life. But there was an agent there; said he knew you, and he had the very people I wanted. The 'cellist isn't bad—an old man, English, though he pretends to be a Swede. One of the violins is a Jew boy who's just had to leave the College—*he's full* of music. The other one I didn't hear, but Mr—the agent,—yes, Cousins,—says

he's good. . . . Oh no, I went to his office in Regent Street to hear them. D'you know, he seemed to be quite hurt at my suggestion that I should want to hear them at all. . . ."

"And when do these artists appear for duty?" asked Petrie.

Cynthia looked at the clock. "In forty minutes," said she. "They're going down with us. Have you got enough money, by the way?—I'm down to about seven shillings, after paying for that beastly room in Covent Garden—and the piano, which I didn't touch, and the stove, that was out. . . ."

"Yes," said Petrie, "I have enough. But suppose, my dear, that I hadn't?"

"Well, there must be heaps of ways of getting it," said Cynthia casually, "—banks and things, I mean."

"Only my watch," said Petrie, "since I observe you're not wearing your bangle. But you are quite right, as a matter of fact—you must just continue seeing things in the large, Cyn, and leaving the provision of details to the ravens. . . . It is the right way: it is the only way, of that I am quite sure."

. . . . . .

Before the week was out Cynthia and her three artists were hard at work.

At a quarter to nine each morning she left home for St James' Parish Hall. There she would find old Froest, the 'cellist, warming his hands, and Marchmont the Jew boy, late of the Royal College of Music, his feet, by the large stove half-way down the hall. The second violin (vague as to nationality beyond the fact that he was a violinist)—a drowsy, delicate-looking fellow of about forty—usually came in a minute or two after her. The four of them would drag the piano out from its corner nearer to the stove, and by a very few minutes after nine they would be at work.

It was no inconvenience to Cynthia that she usually had to go to the hall by way of Stamford Road, in order to leave a message at the grocer's or the oil-shop; or to pick up some fish or a couple of pounds of bacon on the way home. It did not take two minutes, and it might save somebody else's 'running out' during the day.

. . . . . .

Chapter Four

§ 1

AFTER about three weeks of work she went into the study, to find Petrie at work with a pair of scissors upon some newspapers; beside him were a scrap-book and a bottle of paste. He seemed to be in high spirits, so that Cynthia was disappointed only by the fact that he was so busy.

"I *would* like to know," she said, "what you think you do by chopping up all those newspapers?"

"I am interested," said Petrie; "in fact, I am very *deeply* interested in the parasite art called criticism, Cynthia—particularly 'dramatic' criticism, so called. I am also interested in the work of that fellow whose play we went to see when we were up in town. The critics don't seem able to agree why he isn't a dramatist of the very first water, or, indeed, as some say, why he isn't a dramatist at all. You never said, by the way, what *you* thought of 'The First Refusal' as a comedy."

"Well, it's the only one I've ever seen—except, of course, abroad. . . ."

"You could have seen 'The First Refusal' in Holzgarten last year, as a matter of fact—unless it was there during your vacation," said Petrie. "Did no one mention it to you?"

"No," said Cynthia. "There isn't anyone who'd be likely to, excepting Bluebeard. He goes, sometimes, to the theatre when there isn't any music. . . . But I wouldn't call that thing a *comedy*. I always thought a comedy was something to *laugh* at. I felt much more like crying all through that. . . ."

"That," said Petrie, "is just what 'F. P. S.' had to say about it when it was produced—whoever 'F. P. S.' of the *Morning Post* may be. . . . But I think it was Horace Walpole who made the very sound remark that Life is a comedy to those who think, and a tragedy to those who feel. Comedy

and tragedy are attitudes of *mind*, Cynthia, not accidental matters of fact—chance happenings. Your three musicians, for instance — Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego, as your worthy brother calls them. . . ."

"Yes," said Cynthia, "that's just what I'd like to talk to you about, father. They're very much a tragedy at the moment. . . . They'll never *do*, you know. I had no idea that my quartette could be so hard. Poor old Mr Froest can't get near it as it stands." She sat down in the arm-chair, wearied by the thing that had been troubling her for days. "I say, dad," she said, "I do so wish now that you had heard Baradjik in it. You know—the crazy Roumanian boy. You'll never have the chance to hear it now, as I meant it to go—I simply can't get those three up to it."

"Well, let's get your Roumanian over," said Petrie. "It would be worth it. We would have to pay him well, of course. He'd come; great artists will do anything for money—anything, that is, but *work*. What sort of fees . . ."

"Oh, no!" said Cynthia. "He seems to have all the money he wants—besides, he's not taking any engagements."

"Wouldn't he come for *you*?" Petrie asked casually.

"I wouldn't ask him," said Cynthia shortly. "Oh no, thank you. . . . We can manage quite well without him. I might have to simplify it a bit in parts."

"In that case, then," said Petrie, "those things there are not premature." He indicated a roll of brown paper in the corner behind Cynthia.

She undid it, and found it to contain 'double-crown' posters, printed black on yellow:—

A SERIES OF

THREE MUSICAL RECITALS

WILL BE GIVEN BY

MISS CYNTHIA PETRIE

(Winner of the Holzgarten Gold Medal and Kastner Triennial Prize for Singing)

IN

THE TOWN HALL, PELCHESTER

ON

APRIL 10*th*, *APRIL* 28*th*, *MAY* 17*th*

AT 7.45 P.M.

Miss Petrie will be assisted by MM. Froest and Hellier, and Mr Sidney Marchmont, artists well known upon the Concert Platforms of London and the Provinces. The programmes will include performances of Miss Petrie's Prize Work, and selections from the compositions of Ivan Grendel of Moscow.

Tickets (the price of which is ONE GUINEA for the series of three Recitals) may be obtained from Messrs Tilling & Whale, 180 High Street.

Cynthia said, "Oh, my dear, I shall hate going out when the town's all plastered over with those things. . . . I wonder if anyone will think of coming?"

Petrie meanwhile was chuckling. "Genius!" he exclaimed, "nothing short of genius made the 'One Guinea' stick out of the surrounding text like that. *There's* psychology for you, Cynthia."

"H'm," said Cynthia, "but the whole thing's rather vulgar, all the same. Did you ever allow a thing like that to be put up about yourself, father? All that about the prizes and the artists from the London Concert platforms and poor old Grendel, as though everyone ought to be quite familiar with him. . . ."

"No," said Petrie, "perhaps I did not. But then, you see, I had no expert to do these things for me, and there are certain things that one shrinks from doing for one's self. Few people

would extract their own teeth, for instance, but most people are quite willing to go to a dentist. . . ."

"Well," said Cynthia, "I suppose these things will have to do. But I hope the famous artists from 'the London platforms' won't think that the *rest* of the bill is as nonsensical as the part about *them*."

. . . . . .

Then one night Cynthia came again into the study and said, "I say, dad, I wonder what you would say if you were to discover that I was in the habit of smoking?"

"It would rather depend on what you smoked, wouldn't it?" said Petrie, after a moment's pause.

"On what I *smoked*?"

"You see," Petrie explained, "I, for instance, am a pipe smoker, so it is only a matter of form to offer me cigarettes. So, if your smoke is a cigarette, there wouldn't be much point in my asking you to help yourself to my tobacco pouch. . . ."

And all Cynthia could say in her surprise was, "I say, daddy—you are the funniest man. . . . I expect mother'd have a fit, though. I'd better smoke only in here."

"The next thing, seeing that I at the moment haven't one—haven't had one, in fact, for twenty years," Petrie went on quietly, "is for you to produce a cigarette for yourself. I will provide the matches."

Cynthia produced her cigarettes and lighted one. "I suppose heaps of women do smoke nowadays—nice women I mean . . ." she said, and blew a very good ring. Then for no particular reason apart from her fairly regular habit of following up statements with the same statement put in the form of a question, she added, "Do you know any nice women who smoke, dad?"

Petrie's answer was, "I perceive that we are in a somewhat fidgeting frame of mind this evening, Mrs Beethoven."

"Oh dear, yes," said Cynthia. "It's only two days to Friday, April the tenth, at 7.45 p.m., and they just haven't *got it in them*, those three. I *can't* get them to see it. I've chopped it and changed it and twisted it, but they can't *do* it. They're *hopeless*. . . ." She sank, dejected, back in her chair.

"Never mind," said Petrie. "Don't worry about it. You can only hope to keep *your* end up, and no more. Remember too that there will be no one there that matters a fig, nobody that knows the difference between a fugue and a fungus. One or two of the parsons might be able to enjoy it—for music, curiously enough, is a thing that a few parsons are fairly intelligent about. But if they know enough to be able to enjoy it, they will also be able to distinguish the good from the bad among you. . . . Besides, you must remember that you are inclined to exaggerate it all. I'd be willing to bet that you're a great deal more satisfied with your colleagues in their efforts on behalf of Messieurs Tschaikowsky and Arensky. . . ."

"As a matter of fact," said Cynthia quite simply, "*they do* seem to grasp the Tschaikowsky thing a great deal better."

Petrie smiled at her the smile he so often smiled now. It made her feel like a very little girl with her hand in the hand of a very big man. It was something that she had never felt in all her infancy and childhood.

He leaned across the hearth, and patted her head. "You are the most merciless critic in the world, Cynthia," he said, "of the way people play your quartette. For my own humble part, I must say I had scarcely any fault to find with the way you did it this morning."

She stared at him. "You?" she exclaimed.

"Even *I*," said he, "though I had to sit through it cramped and freezing and miserably tobaccoless behind that filthy roll of carpet stuff, up by the stage. . . . And *you*, Cynthia, like an idiot, locked the door behind you, so that I had to make a most undignified exit through the window after you had gone."

Cynthia was still amazed. "But—good gracious me! Why ever didn't you come and sit by the stove?"

"Because," said Petrie, "whether you know it or whether you don't, Cynthia, I am a thoroughly sound critic (as far as such a thing is possible), and I did not wish to have the responsibility of criticism inflicted upon me. . . . I might have preferred to keep silent. . . ."

Cynthia sprang from her chair to the arm of his. "It is the first time that you have heard it properly, with all the

instruments!" she exclaimed, "and you think that it will do! Oh, daddy, if you could only have heard Baradjik and the 'Old Man.' . . . You do, *honestly*, think that I needn't worry about it then?"

"I think," said Petrie, and he laid his hand on her shoulder, "I think—well, I am *convinced* now, little Cyn—to use a pet phrase of yours that struck me as rather pretty—I am convinced that you are 'full of music.' That thing of yours, you know—it's—it's—well, it is *music*. I can say no more than that; nor can anyone else who isn't an idiot paid to do so. The paid idiots, newspaper fellows I mean, will be able to say all sorts of things. It's too long, and too short, and too broad and too thick, and heaven only knows what not. . . . And that is giving you all the criticism possible upon a work of art provided that the statements follow the conjunction 'b-u-t.' Before this conjunction, to anyone with the faintest suspicion of an ear, that thing of yours is simply and solely *good*. . . . Even *I*, Cyn, expected no better of you. And, believe me, I did not expect anything nearly so good."

Cynthia looked first at him, and then away from him, hoping that, somehow or other, the trembling of her lips might cease. Part of the thing before her mind was laughable—an absurd picture of Petrie's long legs doubled up, knees drawn up to chin, as he sat behind the heap of unused floorcloth in St James' Hall, and listened to the things she said to the others in her efforts to rouse them up into response. . . .

Silence did not help in the matter of her lips, so she said, "And it's been just horrible. . . . Nobody has seemed to care a rap about it all. *You've* just paid up all the time, and seemed to think no more about it after that. As for mother and Freda. . . . And all the time you've really been waiting to hear it, and *now* you'll have such a cold. You *heard* what that place has done to the piano. . . . Daddy, dear, why do you do such funny things?"

Petrie very lightly pinched her nearest ear between his finger and thumb. Then he said, "If you give the slightest confirmation to a suspicion of mine that you are inclined to shed tears, I shall banish you from this fireside without further

delay. Tears, Cynthia, are woman's favourite breach of hospitality. . . ."

She sniffed and thrust him away. "I wish you would give up airing your wonderful views about women," she said. "One would think—well . . . you hadn't really *spoken* to a woman for twenty years till you got to know me. Besides, *I* haven't got anything to do with women, daddy: I'm an *artist*."

"Are you indeed?" said Petrie. "God help you then, for you are men, children *and* women."

"And I suppose *that*," said Cynthia, "is one of your epigrams or something. It's a pity you can't think of some way of using up all your bright ideas about women—in a book or something."

"*Something!*" Petrie said. "I wonder if you will *ever* give up that ten-year-old schoolboy diction of yours, Cynthia? Book or 'something,' women or 'something,' epigram or 'something.' . . . Where, by the way, are you doing the quartette? At the end?"

"No," said she, "in the middle."

"I'd be inclined to put it at the end," he suggested.

"I can't very well now. The programmes are printed."

"Devil take the programmes!" Then he added, "You see, the *programmes* won't know. You entice me into further remarks about women when you say things like that. Programmes printed indeed! Let me tell you something. That closing bar of your quartette depends on nothing in the world but sheer joy of sound. It is a simple, straightforward and exceptionally good sound that can reach nearly anybody. There's no cleverness hiding the sheer beauty of it. Do let the poor beggars in the audience have it to take away with them. . . ."

"I only thought," said Cynthia, "that perhaps it would look a little bit bumptious to stick my own thing at the beginning, or the end. But you're right, of *course*. Yes, we'll do it at the end. . . ."

"Good Lord!" Petrie exclaimed. "Can't you have an opinion of your *own* on the subject? I tell you, it is most annoying, to find some one *leaning* on one like that. . . ."

"Oh, there you go," said Cynthia. "Off again! Now tell me that I'm living on Mr Froest's vitality. That ought to come next."

"No," said Petrie, "but if you can't see that your only hope is to pull him and the rest of them through on *yours*, just as you've been doing for the last six weeks, you have far less intelligence than I gave you credit for."

"*Good*-bye!" said Cynthia. "You've gone again. . . . But if you're not going to be very long, I'll wait for you to come back. . . ."

"That's better," laughed Petrie. "It's a much cleaner, more workmanlike method of treating people than the lonely, misunderstood artist act, the gulp in your throat and the 'et tu, Brute.' . . . The next item on the paper is—what do you propose to wear?"

"The green thing, I thought," said Cynthia. "The black's inclined to be dowdy."

"Ask Mrs Simpson what she has done with the parcel I told her to put in your room this afternoon," said Petrie. "It's a reddish, almost wine-coloured affair. You will have all to-morrow for final adjustments, if it needs any."

"What *are* you talking about?" said Cynthia. "Dad—you can't mean that *you* have bought me a dress?"

"God forbid," said Petrie, "that I should ever think of doing such a thing. I merely chose one, which I saw in a shop in London, to be sent to you on approbation."

Cynthia's arms were now round his neck, so that he had to move awkwardly to remove the pipe from his mouth. "My dear," she said, looking at him, "who in the world would ever have expected such a thing from you? . . ." He smiled evasively, cleared his throat, and said nothing. Cynthia went on, "I don't know though. It is, somehow, just the very kind of thing that one *ought* to expect of you, and doesn't. . . ." She kissed his lean, tough cheek.

"I should go," said Petrie, "and try the thing on. The psychological analysis can follow—if necessary."

In twenty minutes she was back again. "Daddy!" she exclaimed, "it's simply *wonderful*. . . . My dear, I've never even *known* anyone who possessed a dress like this. . . . Just

you wait till Sylvia sees it, and the Chills and Freda. . . . And the colour! I believe it *suits* me!"

She stood before him.

"I believed," he said quietly, "that it would."

"And even stockings!" said Cynthia next. "And *such* stockings!"

"Yes," said Petrie, "and even shoes, that the feet of her may be deftly shod." He pulled open the drawer that once had held two bundles of bank-notes, and produced from it a parcel.

She slipped on the shoes that the parcel contained, and said, "*Dad!*—positively like a glove. . . ."

"And now we will look at you," said Petrie.

They stood on the hearth-rug, the cold gaslight hissing down upon her white shoulders. "H'm," he mumbled, half aloud. "Man—woman—and child. . . . The trinity called Artist. . . ." He slowly turned her round before him, and then again stepped away. ". . . So he isn't such a fool as he looks, your silly old dad," he remarked. "He was right, for example, about that touch of silver. . . ."

"*Silver?*" said Cynthia.

"Silver," he answered.

He produced from the drawer another parcel. In it was a leather-covered box, and in the box a great silver clasp, set with green stones.

"Good gracious," said Cynthia, "if it isn't the old paper-knife done up!"

"Yes," said Petrie, "the old paper-knife—the gift of a Russian princess to an infant prodigy. It is, incidentally, the finest piece of work in silver that you will ever see."

He fastened it in her bosom, and looked again at her. "*Now*," said he, "I think you owe it to your mother and sister to give them a run of criticism."

She drew close to him and laid her hands lightly upon his collar. "My old daddy," she said, and then smiled up at him. The hurry of the last half-hour had brought a flush to her whiteness. "Daddy," she said again, and fidgeted with his cravat, "you—you are the most difficult person in the world to thank for anything, you know. And yet it *ought*

to be easy for me—you're the only person I've got to thank for anything—for *everything*, as a matter of fact. There—even now I haven't managed to say 'thank you' for these wonderful things. Why is it, I wonder? Is it because you seem to know all about it already? You *always* seem to have been sitting behind a heap of carpets, like this morning, and to have found everything out—everything one thinks and does and even imagines. . . ."

"Yes," said Petrie slowly, and brushed a strand of hair from her brow. "Yes, Cyn, I suppose I *do* put in a good deal of time behind a heap of carpets, looking on at things, and listening. . . ."

"And so I say *thank* you, my daddy, thank you ever and *ever* so much. . . . There, you see, I did manage to say it at last, even if it *did* sound futile; and I shall manage to kiss your scratchy old face."

In this she found no difficulty, for Petrie had leaned down to meet her lips.

"*Some* day," she said, "I'll show you."

When she stood away from him, his face remained still lowered as he stared fixedly and intent before him.

"Father!" Cynthia exclaimed in startled surprise. "Father! *Don't!*" She roughly shook him by the shoulder. "Good gracious—whatever made you look like that? It's *awful*. . . . What could you have seen?"

"Only the rotten old Tragedy, Cyn," he said, shaking his head. "Some things bring it devilish close to one. . . . Yes; the *Tragedy*. . . . You see, we can *do* these things—we can pay these little compliments to each other; we can caress and smile and try to cheat each other with the lilt of laughter, pretending we're not really alone—in the dark. But we *are* alone. It's only a game of make-believe, this; we're still alone—isolated—and alone we've jolly well got to stay. I can toss you a silver brooch, and we can shake hands and wax merry over the transaction—but the homage to the Genius that wrought the design, I've got to pay in a solitary cell. The genius himself wrought the design in loneliness, and not a creature could share it with him! That is the Tragedy, Cynthia. All the big things before us we've got to do alone.

The real cries—the tears and groans and laughter that are wrung from the inmost soul, there are no ears to hear. . . . All we can make heard are the 'how-d'you-do's' and 'thank-you-so-muches.' . . . We can paddle about like this and play together where it's shallow, but when it comes to having to *swim* for it—or jolly well going down—it's *alone* we've got to swim—or sink."

His voice boomed distantly and hollow on the slowly articulated words. He looked, not at Cynthia in her wine-coloured dress, but unseeing, beyond her, his eyes unblinking in the heavy shadows around them.

A cold shiver ran down Cynthia in her wonderful chiffon. "Oh, daddy!" she said softly.

Then he drew near to her and smiled again. He gently held the lobe of an ear in each hand, and tilted her face up to the light. "But none of that means that the 'how-d'you-do's' and the 'thank-you-so-muches' are not the pleasantest things in the world—and the paddling and playing about together. . . . And, I say, Cyn, I can talk to you about *one* woman—a *nice* woman, too—that smokes." He stooped and kissed her forehead. "Off you go now, my *Artist*—my poor old—sort of a soldier an' sailor too. . . ."

§ 2

During the week before the last of her three concerts Cynthia came home from the hall one afternoon, to find that she and her mother were to be alone together for tea. She was glad of this; Cornad's chaff about Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego, as he called the three artists, was apt to pall at times, and Freda's incessant attacks upon his nonsense were as wearing as the nonsense itself. It was good to be in a quiet room, good to be free of the slight constraint that Petrie's presence would have imposed, if he had been there too.

But he was still away in London.

Mrs Petrie came in and said brightly, "I *wondered* if it would go easily enough to-day for you to be back in good time, my dear." She began, deftly, to pour the tea. Cynthia felt,

somehow, a greater intimacy with her mother in that moment than she had known since her return from Holzgarten.

"Well," she said, "it's nearly over. Thank goodness for *that*, anyway. . . . And then we'll be able to set about getting a few things straight. It's high time you had a little less running about to do, my dear. I can't see where you find so much to do, all the time—with Mrs Simpson here. . . ."

Mrs Petrie said, "It's you, my dear, that ought to be talking of being tired out." There was no trace of the antagonism that there would have been in such a charge four years ago, but it was, nevertheless, an accusation.

"Oh, well, *that* can't be helped," said Cynthia. "Anyone would be tired after weeks of trying to get music out of those three. . . Poor things. I can't imagine what they'll do when we finish. . . ."

Mrs Petrie's little eyes twinkled upon her. "I should just think anyone *would* be tired, darling," she said proudly. "Nor, my dear, could *anyone* have done it better. You *have* put another feather in your cap. Still, thank goodness, it is, as you say, very nearly all over; and there will be nothing for you to do, but wait for the pupils. There's the study, which your father never uses now except in the evenings, when you would not require it—a studio all ready for you, with a little tidying up. Oh yes, my dear . . . I've thought it all out. You need bother no more. The pupils will come of themselves—they're sure to—even if it does take a little time."

Pupils? . . .

Cynthia looked at her mother and smiled; she was so proud, so satisfied and happy; Conrad would have called it "chirpy to the verge of saying willow."

Cynthia said, quietly, "It's *your* house, my dear, that has first to be put in order, after Friday. You've been doing altogether too much, because I haven't had time to stop you. But you just wait till after Friday, and you will see some changes. No more of this frenzied rushing about for you, or we shall just have a bundle of nerves again. . . . I know; I've seen it all the time, only I haven't been able to *do* anything. Sylvia has seen it too. I wonder she hasn't said anything to you about it, especially as she thinks it's all *my* fault. But it

isn't my fault that everything in the house has to be done at least three times. First Mrs Simpson does it, then Freda goes to see that she's done it right, and then you go and do the whole thing over again. . . . That's *no* one's fault; it's just bad organisation, and it's got to be put right."

"There is far more in running a large house *properly*," said Mrs Petrie, "than meets the eye. . . ."

"Oh?" said Cynthia, "and what did I do wrong when I was doing it? *I* was under the impression that we got along quite nicely."

"And so we *did*," said Mrs Petrie. "So we did, dear—but you were very young then, weren't you? Yes, Cynthia, we got on *wonderfully* well—considering. But you need not think you are going to have to start house-keeping again, just because your concerts are over"—once more she spoke with pride—"you will very soon find your work cut out for—with your pupils."

This time Cynthia had to speak, forced to it only by the old, hard resolve never again to shrink from saying a thing to her mother for the simple reason that she hated saying it. "I hadn't thought of settling down to the teaching of a few pupils in this place, you know, mummy. . . ."

"A *few* pupils!" exclaimed Mrs Petrie, "who said a *few* pupils, my dear? You will get them *all* with a little patience, Cynthia. Everyone says *that*. One thing very soon leads to another in these matters, you know. All the people who meet you and hear you at Sylvia's teas—and if you accept the Harbottles' invitation and play at their 'At Home'—they all *talk* among themselves. And there *are* musical people in the town—the way your concerts are being attended ought to show you that, whatever others might say to you about it. It can't be anything but a matter of time now. All you need for your complete success is a little patience."

"M'yes," said Cynthia, "but I'm not at all sure that I want *any* pupils, as a matter of fact. . . . You see, it's not a music-teacher-governess sort of person I want to become, is it?"

"Why should you have bothered so, to *study* music, then?" Mrs Petrie asked.

"To become a *musician*, of course," said Cynthia, "and so it has been nothing but a waste of time and money, giving these silly concerts at all. They haven't led anywhere. Sheer waste of money. . . ."

"It *would* be a waste of money," said Mrs Petrie, "if you were to turn away now, without reaping the harvest you have sown. And you have sown a rich one, my dear. You're tired now, and apt to take a gloomy view of things; but, believe me, no one could have done better."

"Well, it isn't *much* money that's been wasted, at any rate," said Cynthia. "They'll very nearly pay their way—if not quite. . . ."

"Then I certainly can't see that you have *anything* to be bitter about," retorted Mrs Petrie brightly. "You must make allowances for the fact that you are *quite* tired out, my darling—at the end of the course—as anyone would be."

This neat turning of the old tables upon Cynthia tickled her immensely. She smiled and said, "No. You don't quite see what I *mean*, mother. It isn't *pupils* that I *want*. I'm not specially interested in dragging other people as far as I myself have got. It's further that I want to get *myself*. And this kind of thing is no use to me. It's been just like teaching three children their A B C to get those three to play anything. And then, even when it's done and the work all finished, where are we?—Nowhere. It doesn't matter a fig to anyone here whether we do the thing badly or well. . . ."

"Oh, my *dear*," Mrs Petrie remonstrated. "Come! I'm sure you could not have found anyone in the world more enthusiastic than your last two audiences."

It was true: but it was also nothing. Cynthia knew that her mother knew no more now of what she had been trying to explain to her than she had known at the beginning. Everything she had said seemed to be a repetition of something she had said just before it; and she could not think of anything but further repetitions.

"Yes, but it's no *use*," she said, "no use at all, mother—this hanging on here and giving little parlour concerts and things."

She was glad she had said it. She knew that she had

explained nothing; but at the same time she had not kept anything up her sleeve.

Mrs Petrie looked at her a moment, and then looked, unconcernedly, away. "Were you thinking, then, darling—" she began, talking lightly, affecting a nonchalance that was no less than heroic, "I mean, had you planned to go away from home again?" The net result of all her brave bluff was an appeal more poignant than she had ever made to Cynthia before.

"Good gracious, no!" she exclaimed. "Whatever made you think of such a thing? I might have to be away for short times, when I have managed to get some engagements—and father thinks I might get some now—but there's no reason why I should go to *stay* away. . . . I say, mother, besides—I've been thinking about this a good deal lately—why should any of us stay on in this place, the way we do? There's nothing in the world to keep us here, is there?"

Propositions always startled Mrs Petrie.

"What about Sylvia?" she suggested.

"It wouldn't hurt Sylvia," said Cynthia, "she's got her own home—and everything; and you could come and see her as often as you pleased; quite as often as you do now, in fact. . . . No, my dear, London would be the place for us all, if it could possibly be managed. I don't see why. . . ."

"And what about your father's work?"

"Yes, I know," Cynthia admitted slowly. "There is that, of course. But he seems to have saved up some money, you know, mother. And it oughtn't to be very long before I'm doing something fairly good. . . ."

"And *you* support the family?" Mrs Petrie asked tersely.

"Well . . ." said Cynthia, "no; I suppose not at first. . . . But I don't see why father should not be able to work in London just the same as here, with all his experience. . . ."

"Because, my dear," said Mrs Petrie, "appointments are not so easily found by a man of your father's age."

"Yes, but he already does so much of his work away from here now," said Cynthia, "that it oughtn't to make any difference. Instead of living here and going to London for two or three days in the week, he could live in London, and

come here. It's only two hours' journey, when all's said and done."

"You never know," said Mrs Petrie. "It doesn't always do to tamper with one's employers. You must remember that he has done very well here, darling. . . . A bird in the hand, you know. . . ."

"Well, it couldn't do any harm to see what he *thinks* about it, anyway," said Cynthia. "I know he'll agree about my trying to get some engagements. Everyone, even the very best of us, has to do that. . . ."

"But, my dear," Mrs Petrie interrupted, "since you could so very easily make a very good teaching connection here . . ." she was diffident, hesitating to urge her points. "You see, dear, it isn't like it used to be here, you know. People *are* becoming musical. There is the Philharmonic Society now, that George and Sylvia have just joined. There was nothing like that even two years ago. . . . I just can't help thinking —a bird in the hand. . . ."

"But still I don't see your objection to *living* in London," Cynthia urged.

"But I didn't *say* that, my dear," said Mrs Petrie. "What I did say is that you *never know*."

"No, but there's nothing to prevent our trying to find out, is there?" Cynthia smiled. "Of course—it's nothing to *worry* about. I only suggest that we all think it over and talk it over together, quietly."

Mrs Petrie smiled back at her, and Cynthia was delighted with herself for having conducted the discussion so smoothly.

Mrs Petrie had begun, absently, to gather the tea things together.

"*Now*, look at you!" Cynthia exclaimed. "What's the use of keeping a dog and then barking for yourself? You are such a funny thing, mummy. Ring the bell, dear—that's what we keep Mrs Simpson for."

"D'you know, I can never remember that she's here," said Mrs Petrie, and she began to replace the things in their disorder. "You weren't thinking of going out, were you, dear?"

"Might as well," said Cynthia, "a little walk before supper.

I might find father; he said he'd be back at the office this morning. Can I bring in anything?

"Oh no, dear, it doesn't matter, since you're going for a *walk*. It's not important. Any time will do. It's only a packet of that rennet powder. I thought a little junket for lunch to-morrow. . . ."

"Well, a packet of rennet powder ought not to prove a heavy load," said Cynthia, "since it's needed."

"But it isn't needed," said Mrs Petrie, "not before to-morrow. And some one's sure to be going out."

"I'll get it," said Cynthia.

. . . . . .

§ 3

This trifling business of the rennet powder, and the way her mother had begun, quite automatically, with the tea things, the moment they had finished their tea, showed Cynthia that Sylvia had spoken the truth.

Mrs Petrie was undoubtedly getting nervy. They were, in fact, all of them getting nervy. A change would be the finest thing in the world for them. It would be best for Freda and for Conrad.

The only obstacle that Cynthia could see was Petrie's work at Pudleigh & Walker's and Mostyn's. Yet she could not imagine Petrie proving an obstruction in the way of any plan. Somehow or other, she knew he would adapt himself. . . .

She had been before to the office of Pudleigh & Walker's, so she went direct, without any inquiry, to the dingy little door in the yard behind the great shop.

At the foot of the worn, carpetless staircase she asked a man in a green baize apron if Mr Petrie were still in. For answer the man immediately disappeared through a gloomy doorway, and returned with the bald-headed little fellow whom she recognised at once as Burbage, of the Invoice Department.

She repeated her question to him, and he said, "It's Miss Petrie, is it not? I trust you are very well, Miss. . . . No, I cannot say that I have had the pleasure of seeing your father for some little time."

"He's not upstairs, you think?" said Cynthia. "He may have gone straight up without saying anything."

"Oh dear no," said Burbage. "No one goes upstairs without I know of it. I will inquire with pleasure, though, round the corner. He's far more likely to be in the shop, if he made an appointment to meet you here."

"Oh no," said Cynthia, "he didn't make any appointment. I only thought I might just catch him before he left the office. . . ."

"The office!" repeated Burbage, his eyebrows rising, it seemed, to the apex of his bald head. "Ah, yes, but of course you have been away. . . . No, he hasn't been here for months, Miss. . . . *Months*, did I say? Dear me! how time flies! Why, it's three years or more since I have been in the Export — and that was after he left us — three years at Mid-summer. . . ."

All that Cynthia could be sure of now was her own childish pride, that made her feel foolish for having exposed her ignorance to the babbling Burbage. "Oh, *of course*," she said. "What I meant was—he might have looked in—just to see some one."

"Ah yes, quite possibly," agreed he. "Quite possibly—but that would be round at the shop. That's where the Governor's office is now. I'll send round, and inquire with pleasure. . . ."

"Oh, no thanks, don't bother," said Cynthia. "I'm going round that way myself."

And she went straightway down the High Street, to the shop of Shepherd, Mostyn & Barter, Wholesale and Retail Grocers.

There she was cautious. "Do you happen to know Mr Petrie by sight?" she asked a white-coated man who stood near a cash-desk on the ground floor.

The man did not.

Nor did the colleague whom he consulted. But a third man, not a colleague but an overlord in a frock-coat and varnished hair, emerged from an inner office whence he had been listening, and, staring at Cynthia, said, "Petrie? Petrie? —Mr *Petrie?* . . . A customer of ours, ma'am?"

"No," said Cynthia. It was extraordinary how silly she felt talking to these people. "No—I don't suppose so. It —he's my father, as a matter of fact."

"Oh," said the man, "I was thinking for a moment of a gentleman who used to be on our clerical staff some years ago. *Petrie*. The name does strike familiar though. If the gentleman you are looking for is a customer, one of the other departments. . . . It would be no trouble, I assure. . . ."

"No thank you. Please don't bother," said Cynthia; and, forgetting the powder for the junket, she went home.

There was no obstacle at all now, as far as she could see, to their going to London. . . .

Her father was a funny fellow; but the afternoon had made her instinctively cautious.

Freda and her mother were in the sitting-room. After remarking casually that she had not, after all, got the rennet or looked Petrie up, she said just as casually: "I wonder where father finds so much to keep him busy these days."

"There are the *two* offices, you see, dear," said Mrs Petrie. "There must be a great deal to keep him busy. It was quite soon after you went away that he gave up coming home to his tea regularly, even when he had not been sent to London."

This very nearly told Cynthia all she was seeking to discover. She merely required confirmation; she put another question —a masterpiece, it seemed, of ingenuity. "I wonder if the offices have moved."

"Why should they move?" said Mrs Petrie. "The businesses are *expanding*, my dear."

So her mother and Freda did not know! . . . He was a funny fellow!

Cynthia smiled.

. . . . . .

§ 4

She smiled again when Petrie strolled in to supper.

The astonishing thing was not at all that Petrie should have a casual secret of any kind—that was simply the kind of thing one was always expecting of him.

The astonishing thing was that he should have succeeded in keeping it all that time, when every day held a hundred and one chances that might have discovered it. . . .

He made some amiable, commonplace remark, and yet again Cynthia smiled at the boyish deceit of him. . . . He was such a *baby*, with his curly head flecked with grey. She was beginning to feel that she knew him so well, now that she knew a secret with which she could tease him. . . .

Anyhow, it meant that the two businesses no longer existed as obstacles to their going away to London.

She followed him into the study soon after they had finished their meal.

"Get back in good time, dad?" she asked.

"Yes," said he lazily. He was in what Cynthia called one of his 'browsing moods,' lying deep in the arm-chair, with his slippered feet high up by the mantelpiece. His pipe-bowl rested, purring, upon his necktie, and he quietly smouldered rather than smoked. "Breakfast on the train. That's the way to travel. Had some lunch sent in on a tray. . . ."

"Oh—busy as all that!" said Cynthia. "It occurred to me that we might have gone out for a walk, after you had finished—with the office."

He gave no sign whatever. He simply said, "Why didn't you fix it up, then, before I went away? There's always something to keep me busy at the office—unless we arrange something else beforehand. . . ."

It struck Cynthia that she was taking a very mean advantage of him, allowing him to go on perjuring himself, to no purpose. She gave him another chance. "I suppose it's kept up your French and German wonderfully," she said, watching him intently—"I mean, having all those letters to write every day . . . I daresay you've *improved*, if anything."

"I was not aware," said Petrie with another lazy wreath of smoke, "that either my French or my German ever stood in need of improvement."

She did not wonder any more that he had succeeded in keeping his secret. Half the art of lying, she perceived, when the art amounts to nothing short of genius, consists in avoiding the telling of lies. She began to wonder, instead, what on

earth the secret could be. It must be something vital, she thought, for him to have kept it so carefully; then again, it might be absolutely nothing at all.

However, he was free of Pudleighs and of Mostyns; that fact remained; but since even that fact could have no vital import till after Friday, she smiled once more in her triumph over poor Petrie, and went to bed.

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Chapter Five

§ 1

ON Saturday morning, after the last of her concerts, Cynthia went out into the High Street. (They had not yet had the junket, as everyone in turn had forgotten, for ten days, to get the rennet powder.) As she came out of the shop she spied Sylvia with her perambulator. She did not particularly want to talk to Sylvia at that moment; but Sylvia had seen her going into the shop, and was waiting for her to come out.

"I've finished," said Sylvia, indicating a shopping bag tucked under the feet of her son. "We'll walk back, shall we?"

Cynthia fell into step beside her. She felt, now that the concerts were over, curiously defenceless. She had always felt a vague menace in Sylvia's smug superiority. Sylvia's house had now had the electric light put in, and main sewage. Sylvia had a new vacuum cleaner, and was going to have a new baby—and Sylvia was one of those people that are placed at a decided advantage by having things and being about to have them. She was, moreover, a minister very much with portfolio; Cynthia was now without portfolio.

"I should think you'd be *glad*, my dear, like all the rest of us," said Sylvia, as they turned aside from the High Street at the Tramway junction.

"What about?" said Cynthia, knowing perfectly well "I suppose you mean about the Tschaikowski thing. Little Marchmont improved amazingly, didn't he?"

"Yes," said Sylvia. "Pity he squints so badly. It put one off, having to look at him. I meant about its being all over, though." They turned into Victoria Crescent, Cynthia helping with the front wheels of the pram crossing from one pavement to the other. "Poor mother will be able to let go a little now. . . ."

"Let go of what?" asked Cynthia, beginning to bristle.

"The house," said Sylvia quietly. "Yes, my dear, it must be four years—it *is* four years since she started doing it all. . . ."

"All what?" said Cynthia. She did not wish to have a useless quarrel with Sylvia; and so the only way she had of expressing her annoyance was to obstruct by asking questions to which she knew the answer.

Sylvia's evasive manner of speaking, her deliberate dullness of tone, had irritated her since infancy; and Sylvia had developed these, since marrying George, into the utterly lifeless monotones of those who have nothing to express but pity or personal blame of their acquaintances.

The jolts from the pavement to the street and back again to the pavement had aroused the infant George from his slumbers and he looked up, mumbling bubbles and meaningless sounds.

"Arnky Tin-tear!" he gurgled at last, to which she only answered, "H'm . . . so you're awake, are you?" To Sylvia she said, "Well, yes. I suppose there's no reason now why she shouldn't go back to bed—and her headaches—again; since you're so sure that it's so much better for her."

But Sylvia's superiority remained unruffled. "Poor darling!" she said. "She would be so utterly lost. It would be positively cruel to shut her out of things again—altogether . . . such a pity it all had to be so hard . . . altogether too much for her, as everyone sees. . . ."

"Do *you* find housekeeping so desperately hard then?" Cynthia asked.

"It depends a good deal on the way things are done, whether it is hard or not—poor ickle backie tired? Lie down then peshesh . . ." She unfastened a strap and readjusted George at a different angle, hiding his staring eyes behind his nostrils and his bulging cheeks. "Of course, there's an easy way of keeping a house, as well as a hard one. . . ."

"*I* didn't find it so precious hard," said Cynthia, "but I suppose I made a mess of it—in the easy way. Though as long as everyone had enough to eat and everything was clean—well, I don't see what more can be needed in housekeeping than that. . . ."

"Some people think in that way," said Sylvia, "only mother might just happen to think differently."

They walked on a few minutes in silence, then Cynthia said, "I suppose even you will admit that mother's been *better* since she's had something to do, instead of just moping about all the time like she did in the old days?"

"Having something to do," said Sylvia, still without any emotion whatever, "is one thing. Slaving, single-handed, from morning till late at night, is quite another—especially for an elderly body who has never been over strong."

Cynthia said, "Slaving from morning till night, indeed! . . . What you don't seem to realise, my dear, is that some people are simply born to fuss over trifles, and they always will do it, whatever anyone else may try to do to prevent it. 'Working your fingers to the bone' seems to agree with *you*, for instance. . . . Slaving from morning till night. . . ." Then she pulled herself up. "Has mother *said* she's not feeling so well?" she asked, quietly.

"My dear," said Sylvia, "one does not need to be told these things—in so many words."

"The fact of the matter *is*," said Cynthia, "that this place is enough to drive anyone nearly out of their senses. It's all very well for you with your Georges and your house—and things to keep you occupied here. But what *we* want is a change; and I mean to see that we have it before very long. We will go away. . . ."

"Oh!" said Sylvia, eyebrows raised just the faintest shade, "and what about father's work?"

So even George and Sylvia did not know.

"Oh, father will be alright," Cynthia reassured her. "Don't you worry about father."

"If you think of going *away*," said Sylvia, "I should like to know what your idea was in spending all that money on the concerts."

"Even *that* I shouldn't worry about," said Cynthia. "We cleared just seventeen pounds on the three concerts."

"*Then* I don't see why you think of going."

"*Change!*" said Cynthia. "*Change!* What is there for any of us here? Me or Freda or the Boy or mother—even

father? There's nothing in the world to keep us here. Freda wants to become a secretary, or something like that. Goodness knows what Conrad will want to do; only I'm sure he won't want to do it here. Father—well, father will be alright. Mother will be better for a change of air after all these years, and I shall be able to get engagements; be in the *swim* of things."

"You could quite easily get the accompanying for the Phil." Sylvia referred thus familiarly to the new Philharmonic Society.

"H'm," sniffed Cynthia. "Freda could knit a new sports coat and Conrad could go on collecting postage stamps." There was not much point to this remark; but it was good enough for Sylvia.

Walking home, she felt that it would take an angel to avoid being rubbed up the wrong way by Sylvia.

. . . . . .

§ 2

Petrie had gone away that morning, leaving a note to say that he hoped to be back on Sunday.

Going to bed Cynthia suddenly said, "Do *you* think that mother's breaking down, Free? . . . under stress of work?"

"Breaking down?" exclaimed Freda. "She's breaking *me* down right enough. Positively, my dear, at times I have thought that I couldn't stand it another day. . . . Thank *God* your shows are over, and you'll be able to take your share of it now."

This was alarming. Freda often said shocking things, things that offended the ears of Mrs Petrie; slangy, quite meaningless oaths and imprecations; but now she called, quite seriously and after due deliberation, upon the Creator, "Thank God."

She sat, furthermore, upon the edge of her bed, hands tightly clenched by her sides, eyes flashing. Cynthia went and sat down beside her. This was the "little" sister, the tomboy thing that had never shown a petty spirit, however petty the crisis.

"*Free!*" said Cynthia, coaxingly; "you don't mean to tell me that housekeeping's too great a burden for *you?*"

"*Housekeeping* indeed!" sneered Freda. "Pooh! I could run two hotels with far less bother than mother gives over this—this desirable, double-fronted residence. . . ."

"What's wrong, then?" asked Cynthia, "that you should be so upset?"

"Wrong!" said Freda, "you just wait till you've had a dose of it! You haven't even seen it yet, my dear—you've been so 'gloriously aloof' with your other fish to fry. It's just nothing but one long fuss, fuss, fuss—from morning till night. And all about nothing at all."

"And so you think it will improve matters for another one to join in?" said Cynthia. "Me, for instance?"

"No. But I do venture to suggest that you should join in to take your share of *mother*. I've had it for four years now, don't forget; and I've had just about enough. I'm glad you spoke about it, Cynthia; I thought I'd just wait a day or two and see if you would, before *I* opened fire. . . ."

Cynthia thought quietly for a moment, then she moved a little closer to Freda, who still sat stiffly erect, hands tightly clenched. "I say, old Free," she said, "don't think I haven't seen what a perfect brick you've been, old girl. It—it must have been a bit dull at times."

"Oh, I'm not *pitying* myself, my dear," said Freda, with a toss of her head. "It's been alright, as far as that goes—but it's all too ridiculous and—and damnably silly. It's all because we're *women*. I've got some things for you to *read*, my dear, that will make you just stop and have a little *think* now and again. Because we're women, people are apt to resist any efforts on our part to *exist* even,—except as mistresses and menials, like Sylvia and me! *You*, of course, are all right now. But don't for a moment imagine that *I* don't know how you must have had to fight and push to emancipate yourself like you have. It was *fine*."

Her admiration forced her to turn, so that she looked up at Cynthia, and she repeated, almost inaudibly, through parted lips that were fuller than Cynthia's—a medium more plastic for pouting and smiling—"*Fine*."

Cynthia did not know this Freda. It was some one between whom and herself she felt an astonishing bond. "*I* did not have much fighting or pushing to do, my dear," she said. "But I haven't had time to notice much, lately, what a brick you've been."

"Oh, you don't have to tell *me* how much pushing you had to do. Don't you forget that I know mother—but it's my turn now, since you've finished." She stood up and unfastened her belt.

"Finished!" said Cynthia, "indeed I haven't finished; but that's not going to interfere with you or anyone else. . . . . What's your programme, by the way, since you seem to have a programme?"

"Oh yes, I've got a programme right enough," said Freda, the old, little Freda again, with fluffy hair tumbling down about her shoulders, and head tilted pertly upwards. "*Efficiency*. That is what *I* believe in, my dear. It is the first duty of every woman to be *efficient*. We're a pack of fools, taken all round—*you're* not, of course. You've got your profession, and have shown yourself to be worth your salt. You're a first-class artist, not merely a specimen of your sex, like most of us others. Look at Sylvia and all the rest of them—just botanical things—merely female; and poor mother! I suppose it was all very well in the last generation. But I'm going to become efficient, and what's more, I'm going to look slippy about it. I know *you* won't stand in the way even if the others do. . . ."

"Have you been talking to father?" asked Cynthia, thinking that perhaps she saw a little light.

"Father indeed! I shouldn't think there's much change to be got out of talking to a *man* about these things. Oh no, my dear, I don't look to anyone of the last generation for help, I assure you. It's *reading* that I've got most of it from; and a little from—from other sources."

"You needn't bother to go about *conspiring* where *I'm* concerned," said Cynthia, recognising again the old Freda. "I know pretty well the kind of thing you mean. Also, you can take it from me that father doesn't belong particularly to the last generation. . . . I don't think there can be another

man in the world quite like father. There isn't very much he doesn't understand—if he ever bothers to bother about it. . . . And what do you propose to become efficient at ?" There was no suggestion of a sneer in the question, though anyone who did not know Cynthia's manner as well as Freda did would have thought there was.

"Not nursing," said Freda; "I couldn't stand nursing at any price. And I don't see why on earth it should be nursing either—just because every other female who does anything at all does nursing. All I want is *competence*, Cynthia—*you've* got it, old girl, so why shouldn't I get it too ?—just a level head and sound brains in decent working order." (That particular phrase was familiar to Cynthia. She had read it herself somewhere—or had Petrie said it ?—No. It was in one of those plays he had given her to read. It lost a little value now from that fact.) But Sylvia went on: "And if that isn't enough, as it is in the case of a man—just because I happen not to be a man—well then, I'll learn to whack a typewriter and write that shorthand stuff and become a secretary or something. I'm sure I'm not in the least particular what it is—as long as it's something of my *own* and not anyone else's. I'm going to break away, my dear, and that is the long and the short of it."

She was in bed now. Undressing was no great business with her, just a matter of a few quick gestures. "Well ?" she challenged, and flung her scattered hair into a ribbon.

"Well," said Cynthia; "so *that's* what's been happening to you in the last few years, is it ? . . . Three cheers for the 'other sources.' But you need not be so excited over it, Christabel. I have a scheme, my dear—Has it never occurred to you that we might just as well be living in London ?"

"How can we live in London—all of us, with father tied to his old shops ?" She followed her question with a sniff that is not represented by any literary device.

Cynthia paused a moment; decided to wait. "Don't worry about *that*," she said reassuringly. "Father can make that all right. That's the scheme, my dear—*London*. There'll be nothing to stop your quest of the level head and boiling brain *there*, my child."

The light was out and Cynthia, too, was in bed. This banter was only on the surface.

"Good-night, old Cynthia."

"Good-night, Free."

Deep down the bond had been established.

"Not much point in *talking* about this thing, do you think?" Freda asked, diffident and a little sleepy.

"You mean talking to anyone else?" said Cynthia; "shouldn't think so—just yet."

The bond was sealed.

"Asleep, Free?" This a few minutes later. "What became of that boy with the funny name who used to be so sweet on you? You know the one I mean—used to wet his hair and plaster it back. *You* know—I saw him kissing you one evening just before I went away."

"Oh, yes," said Freda, "that's a nice question to wake one up to ask. Gerald Lamery—he's alright. I hear from him occasionally. He's up at Cambridge now; I never saw anything specially funny about his name, though. . . . He came down for your concert last night, as a matter of fact. Goes off again to-morrow. *He* says you're utterly wasted down here, ought to be in London."

"So ought everyone to be in London," said Cynthia. "And so everyone jolly well shall be, before *much* longer. Mr Lamery, by the way, isn't likely to be requiring the services of a secretary in the near or distant future, is he?"

"Ass," said Freda, turning over. "I bet *your* past of the last three years or so would make some handsome reading."

"It's high time, if you ask *me*," said Cynthia, "that all children were *asleep*."

They both very soon were.

. . . . . .

§ 3

Petrie returned from London just in time for lunch on Sunday, with half a dozen newspapers tucked under his arm.

"We'll walk up the Hill after lunch, Cynthia, shall we?" he said, "and have a look through these things?"

On Wilton's Hill he sat beside her on one of the benches, and smoked quietly while she looked through the reports of her Concert in the papers—some of them Saturday's and two Sunday's.

She eventually laid down the last one and said "H'm."

Petrie said, "Two hums—one being mine. But what do you think of it all, old girl?—In my humble opinion that *Morning Post* fellow is improving; yes, he is getting distinctly better. And ridiculous as it may seem to you, my dear, there are people who would definitely engage a musician without even bothering to hear her for themselves, on the strength of a paragraph like that. You must cut all these out, you know, and stick them in a book. Then, with the judicious use of asterisks and repeated full stops, we can have them all printed on a single sheet of paper, headed 'A Few Press Opinions,' and—and there we are."

Cynthia again said "H'm."

Petrie looked down at the papers in her lap, and relighted his pipe. "By the way," he said casually, "what did you think of that fellow 'R.'s' remarks?"

"The one in the yellowish looking paper—the Sunday one?" Cynthia asked.

"Good Lord, no," said Petrie. "That's that idiot 'Chaffinch.' I mean the short one in the evening paper. The one who does not waste so much space on what you have already done, as he does on suggesting what, in his very humble opinion, you ought to do next. The fellow who says you ought to get experience—experience of *Music*—of thinking it and hearing it and making it; and that it doesn't matter a fig whether you make it on an orchestra or a fiddle or a concertina, on your throat or a grand piano—as long as you *do* make it. And I think that a piano is perhaps the most convenient—as you can already work a piano fairly efficiently. . . ."

"Now we have come very much to the point, dad," Cynthia said, turning suddenly round to him; "and I was as sure as I could be that you would agree with me. . . . *Engagements*. These things here were all very well in their way—but they were sort of amateurish, weren't they?—just parlour tricks; all very well for tickling poor mother and Sylvia; but—I say,

daddy, you seem to know all about these things—how can I *get* engagements."

"Some recitals, I suppose," said Petrie. "Nowadays apprenticeships are seldom served in garrets, with empty stomachs and paper shirts. You would have to start with a fur coat and recitals. All you have to do is *work*. Work like the very deuce till you're ready—our hard-earned savings will do the rest—the fur-coat effect, I mean. You can have the Study and the old 'Chick'—if it's still good enough for you—I'll have the rest of my stuff cleared out of the room for you. . . ."

"But why the study?" asked Cynthia, "Why *this* particular study, I mean."

"Well—you could clear out again," said Petrie slowly, "if you prefer to. If you think you would do any better for being by yourself. . . . Only I thought you were getting on fairly comfortably at home. I was under the impression that things were adjusting themselves to you fairly satisfactorily. . . ."

"Yes, but there's *all* of us," said Cynthia. "I rather like being at home, you know, daddy—and there's Sylvia too; and it would be just splendid for mother. What I meant was, why on earth aren't we—*all* of us—in London?"

"Quite out of the question," said Petrie, looking away from her down upon the shining roofs of Pelchester. "You seem to forget that I have obligations in the place—paid work."

Cynthia lost patience. "It's no use playing *that* game, daddy," she said. "I happen to know all about it. You haven't been to either of the offices for years. So there! They told me so at both of them."

"The devil they did!" exclaimed Petrie, staring suddenly at her, startled and fidgeting with the knob of his walking-stick. "I—er—what I mean to say is—look *here*, Cynthia! I should be extremely obliged if you would refrain from meddling in my affairs. . . ."

"I did *not* meddle in your affairs," she said. "They just happened to tell me it, when I went looking for you to come out for a walk—days ago."

"Then you ought to have told me about it at once," snapped he. "It isn't playing the game to keep things up your sleeve

in that underhand, secretive manner. Any *man* would know a thing like that instinctively. Your brother Conrad would not play a dirty trick like that, even at his age. . . ."

"*You* are a nice one to talk about secretive manners, I do declare," exclaimed Cynthia. "You who've had a thing up your sleeve for years. I do. . . ."

"Please do not talk such unmitigated nonsense, young woman," he snapped again. "The cases are not parallel in a single detail. You might have landed me in all sorts of perfectly ridiculous difficulties. . . . You could quite easily have undone years of—of very careful labour and planning. . . ."

"Sorry, old daddy," said Cynthia, and gently laid her hand on his knee. She did not know what she was apologising for, how she had hurt him and upset him.

"Oh *that* is alright," said Petrie, and touched her hand. "*That's* nothing. . . . Where, by the way, did your information come from?"

"Both the offices," said Cynthia.

"*Both* the offices!" he exclaimed, and then laughed a peal of most convincing laughter. "*Both* the offices! But, my dear girl, there are not *two* offices in this great city of ours, there are something like two thousand. Of course I do not go to old Pudleigh's any more, or that other place—and that, my dear, is a secret between our two selves. My office is another one. . . . I—I. No. I *was* going to say that you could come and see it one of these days. But I'm sorry. As a matter of fact, you can't. I have a principle. . . ."

"But, daddy, wherever your office is," she began to argue; "and I assure you, my dear, I don't *want* to see your dirty old office—I'm not trying to meddle in your affairs—but wherever it is, you don't spend a great deal of time in it, because you're in London half the week. If you have to come back here for two or three days in the week—and mind you, I just don't believe that you do have to—well, you could come."

"D'you know," said Petrie, and leaned thoughtfully back, eyes half-closed, lips parted in his whimsical smile of contemplation, "that remark of yours about my dirty old office carried not the least offence. The reason for that, I'm sure, is that it was a perfectly childish thing to say, and you said

it in perfectly childish words. So it was, on the contrary, quite charming. If you had translated it into sober, adult diction it would no doubt have annoyed me. The only way to call a man a clumsy idiot, for instance, without really offending him, is by saying 'Clumsy idiot!' If you say, 'Pardon me, but I am afraid you are scarcely deft enough to undertake so and so . . .' I have a friend you know, a sculptor fellow; I suppose it's something like that that he means by 'sense of medium'! . . ."

"Yes, but what about London?" asked Cynthia.

"Oh yes—of course—London," said Petrie, and he sat up again, eyes wide open. Suddenly he clutched at her arm and said, "Cynthia, look here, my dear . . . I—I don't want to be selfish. God forbid that I should think of playing only my own hand where you—or any other artist—are concerned. But it never occurred to me—honestly it didn't, old girl—that being away from London was causing you any hardship or—inconvenience. I don't ask very much of people; I try, as a matter of fact, like the very devil, to ask nothing of them, but—but I do ask for *London*. Don't, please don't make a mess of London for me. . . ."

She stared at him in utter astonishment.

"And *don't* look at me like *that*," he said with a smile. "I assure you that that isn't the case. You know young Jefferson who came down for all three of your shows? Well, young Jefferson knows more about brains than any other man in Harley Street—he's got more, himself, to start with—but there's too much of the thinker about him and too little of the grocer to make much of a practitioner of him. Jefferson agreed that I am the sanest man he had ever come across. That was *years* ago, and I've grown a good deal saner since. You must have noticed that for yourself. Jeff pocketed his five guineas and we became the cronies we have remained ever since. But about this London idea of yours; do—do you think me an unreasonable beast, Cynthia, for wanting to keep London? Yes. Of course you do."

"I don't know what you mean," said Cynthia.

It was half the truth. The other half was that she was surprised and terribly disappointed. Castles in air, that she

had been building for the past few days, had got well above the ground floor. They had fallen now, in a sudden heap.

"Don't—*don't* look like that over it, little Cyn," said Petrie gently. "And above all, for the love of Heaven, don't reproach me with tears. I've done all I humanly could do for you. I—I . . ."

"I know that, daddy," said she bravely, looking away from him and biting her lip.

"Only this thing's—different. You see, it startled me a bit at first, you stumbling in upon it—but there! It only needs a little quiet sense to arrange it. The fact of the matter is—well, we can't *all* go to London. Don't ask me why, Cynthia—at least, do ask me if you must, only I shall refuse, flatly, to tell you. The reason is a purely economic one. Incidentally, Jefferson agrees with me. We *can't*. If I was the stumbling block here, and you wanted me out of the way, I would go away to London or anywhere else. If it is you that must go—well, old girl—you must go—leaving us all here. What's wrong with that for a suggestion?"

"Well, there's Freda to be thought of now," she said. "It's her turn."

"Her turn?" said Petrie; "what is it that you want Freda to do?"

"Oh, she wants to learn something or other," said Cynthia. "She wants to *do* something or other; I forget exactly what—she got it out of a play, the idea—efficient brains and things—wants to *be* something, of her *own*. I think she's perfectly right, dad, don't you?"

Petrie smiled before he said: "Undoubtedly, there is *something* in it. . . . Look here, Cynthia. How would you two girls like to keep house for yourselves in a flat in London? We could stay on here—your mother and brother and I. You could visit each other frequently. . . ."

"The housework's too much for mother; that's another thing," said Cynthia. "She'd have to come with *us*."

"You ask her," said Petrie. "Let her decide for herself, whether she is willing to go away from me now. . . ." His eyes twinkled. "If housekeeping is too much for your mother—damme, she shall have a housekeeper. . . ."

"Will *you* come to see us?" asked Cynthia. "You could stay with us, dad. You're always going to London."

"I've been going far too often," said Petrie, shaking his head. "You see, Cynthia, I—er—to tell you the truth, I do not want the fact of this factory of mine here to leak out. Will you try to remember that?"

"*I* don't see anything to be ashamed of in having a factory," said Cynthia.

"It's frightfully hard to overcome old prejudices, my dear," Petrie said. "Anyhow, you will respect the secret for me. . . . So our Freda has begun to feel the need of the level head and sound brains in decent working order. . . ."

"How did you know she said *that*?" asked Cynthia.

"Didn't you just tell me?" said he. She assumed that she must have. "Well, you shall go, then, my two adventurers, and see what the world holds for you in the shape of brains and engagements. And don't you go trying to prejudice your mother against staying here with me. We nearly understand each other now, she and I, and with a very little mutual deceit —for example, my factory—we get on uncommonly well. *I* will arrange all that. Just tell Freda to buck up and get her career chosen. You decide what you're going to do for your recitals. We can very soon find you a desirable flat, large enough to take the 'Chick'—unless you're going to insist on a new Broadwood. By *Jove*!" and he filled his chest expansively with tobacco smoke, "what *must* it be like at twenty-two, with as much money as you require, and a father who does not insist on your being either a nun or an understudy, who doesn't insist, like other parents, on *eating* you."

"My dear!" she exclaimed, cheeks aglow under the hair that had blown across them; "it's too wonderful for words. Old Free will go off her head with joy. It's wonderful, daddy!"

She squeezed his arm. They gathered up the papers and walked home.

"I say, dad!" she exclaimed, as they swung along, her arm linked in his. "Suppose I succeed?—really succeed, I mean. You know, something quite huge—to astonish *you* even. What about leaving London to you then?"

"My little share of London," said Petrie quietly, "need not interfere with yours. In fact, I shan't interfere with you in any way at all. I haven't done so yet, have I, old girl."

His pride in saying this was as boyish as any of Conrad's bragging.

End of Book II

Book Three: Chapter One

§ 1

SLIGHTLY less than a year after this, Petrie sat in the morning-room of a flat in Hanover Square, arguing with a woman.

The gurgling pipe and long bony hand that closed over its bowl were those of the old familiar Petrie; so also were the lean face with jaw set stubbornly and eyebrow whimsically cocked, and the crisp hair—very slightly greyer, perhaps, about the temples. For the rest, a shining silk hat on the sofa beside him, a faultless morning coat, and dark trousers with a light stripe and precise creases that exaggerated more than ever the tremendous length of his legs, disguised him almost beyond recognition.

The flat in which he sat was Madeline Stringer's, and the woman with whom he argued was Madeline Stringer herself. It was she who had for three hundred nights filled the Kingsway Theatre for Harold Rockleigh's tremendous farce, "Strivers All," thus following up her huge success in his comedy, "The First Refusal."

Caricatures, "full-pages" in the weeklies, an occasional block in the dailies, and countless picture-postcards had made her features as familiar to the British public as those of its monarch.

Just as a large photograph of the king was used to advertise the excellence of a certain bicycle, so photographs (both large and small) of Madeline Stringer were used to advertise the excellence of a shoe, a soap, a stylographic fountain-pen, a motor-car and a vacuum cleaner.

Yet she was not, in any sense of the words, a beauty. She was small, to the point almost of insignificance; her large blue-black eyes made, with her pursed-up lips, the three vivid spots in her pallid face which brought easy guineas to even the worst of the pen and ink cartoonists. At forty her hair was what it had always been, a coil of shimmering, unfaded black.

She sat forward and upright in the armchair (that could quite easily have held three of her) showing all the outward signs of exasperation, thus suggesting that the argument between her and Petrie was not a new one, nor Petrie a man with whom she hoped for any great measure of success.

She frowned and shrugged her shoulders and gestured slightly with her hands, and tapped upon the floor with the daintily shod foot that scarcely reached it.

"It's all very *well*, my dear Hal," she said; "but it isn't at all fair to those of us who know that you happen also to be a Mr Charles Petrie of the Provinces. It's perfectly silly. And a *nuisance*."

"I don't see it," said Petrie quietly. "I don't ask any of you to do anything. I only ask you to continue *not* doing anything at all. And that is very little more than minding your own business."

"It isn't true," she retorted; "you definitely asked me to go to hear Cynthia at her Recital, and tell you what I thought of her. . . ."

"Only if you didn't mind," Petrie corrected. "That I *did* try to make very clear. I did not, in fact, even ask you to go. I merely called your attention to the fact that a young pianist in whom I am very interested, since she happens to be my daughter, was about to give her second recital at the Zephyrian Hall. I did admit that I should be interested in your opinion of this artist and also of her sister. But bless my soul, it never occurred to me that you would be so inconvenienced. . . . I don't a bit see why you could not have said that you would rather not go, Maddie. . . ."

"Oh don't be so *absurd*. Of course I didn't mind."

"Then," said Petrie, calmly, "I'm hanged if I can see what you have to complain of."

This produced another shrug of Madeline's shoulders, another gesture of the hands, and another tap upon the floor.

"It's all very well for *you*," she said; "you never happen to think of a thing. No one expected you till to-morrow, and yet you walk in here, as calmly as you please on the very day that your precious daughters are coming to tea with me. It is

just by the merest chance that you didn't come to tea as well, or they to lunch."

"Oh come, Maddie. That's an exaggeration, you know," he remonstrated. "I wouldn't think of coming to tea. I never come to tea with you, and I knew you would never ask them to lunch."

"Well, at any rate," she went on; "there you sit smoking your pipe when the evidence of that particular pipe would be accepted even in a court of law, and there is no means of ventilation or fumigation in the world that could get rid of it under twenty-four hours." She pushed a box of cigarettes towards him, and he put the old pipe away in a new leather case.

"I know well enough that you will stick to your idea however silly it may be," she said resignedly and went to the mantelpiece.

Upon it was a crayon drawing: only an after supper scribble, but it was obviously of Petrie. Obviously, too, it was the work of Owen James, though the name of Owen James meant nothing at all to the dealers in those days.

Beside it was a little sketch in clay—the head no larger than an egg—also of Petrie. This was the work of a certain Count Osobisty—known to a few choice spirits as "Antipon"—who had left his ancestors somewhere about Roumania for Eton, and Eton for Oxford, and had got no farther than Paris in his two attempts to return to the affairs that demanded his presence at home. Now he lived in Chelsea, sketching in wax and clay, marble and wood with a dexterity all his own. His weird, ruthless vision saw human muscles, and especially facial muscles, as draperies stretched and hung upon the structure of bone beneath. So this little head upon the mantelpiece, with its bumps of bone above the slightly puckered brows, its taut strap of muscle from jaw to cheekbone, and its little fold of skin above the large Adam's-apple as the chin turned slightly down towards the left shoulder, had been to him a few hours of tremendous fun. To a few others it was a mystery of impatient genius. To two or three it was more even than this—the head of Petrie.

Madeline took it and the drawing and put them in a drawer

of her writing-desk. "*This* is the sort of thing that I mean you never think of, Hal," she said rather wearily.

Petrie said nothing.

She sat down again, and started along a new line. "Even suppose that it *was* best for this nonsensical secrecy to go on, Hal: my point is that it simply *can't* go on. I daresay you could go on for ever taking people like Cynthia in, and your wife and a few others. But if you think Miss Freda won't find it out, you're very much mistaken, my dear. She already suspects you of being at the bottom of my going round to see them. I'm sure I don't know why, but I know that she does. I *felt* it in a moment, and it makes me positively fidgety to think that they will be here in a few hours. Why not have done with it, Hal?" She had given up arguing now, and was merely coaxing him. "Don't you see, if you don't break it to them gently, they'll find it out for themselves in some utterly ridiculous and farcical way: and—and they'll only think all sorts of things that we don't want them to think—things there's no need in the world for them to find out?"

Petrie was frowning, perplexed, trying to do the best he could with a cigarette.

She continued: "That girl Cynthia might quite well become as famous as we are in no time now. The 'Chaffinch' thinks she's fine. . . . Oh, I know you think the 'Chaffinch' a perfect fool, but nobody else does. His opinion may be perfect nonsense, but it has more influence than any other critic's. At *any* moment now she might appear suddenly in the limelight, and one glance at her would be enough to show any of the little crowd that knows you whose daughter she is. . . ."

"I had thought of that," said Petrie. "It's like this, Maddie. No one who knows me will ever go to hear her, except Jefferson, and he already knows. That is why I am singularly fortunate in being mixed up, almost exclusively, with theatre people. They're always rehearsing while musicians give recitals, and performing during concerts. There's only the critics and Antipon and James to worry about. Antipon or James would spot it in a moment, of course, but I cannot imagine any circumstances that could lure either of them to a place of music. As for the critics, the old 'Chaffinch' is

as blind as a bat, and the others are bigger fools even than the 'Chaffinch.' The only danger in the world can arise from the exhibition and publication of photographs, which actors and actresses might come across in the search for their own. But even if Cynthia were the prodigy of the age, it would be ten to fifteen years before her picture gets into an illustrated paper. Freda's will, since she is going to be made a secretary or something to that votes for women establishment of yours, and she will, sooner or later, get into scrapes; but Freda is no more like me than the man in the moon. Then there is the question of my own photograph. That, too, I have catered for, my dear. It is just possible that I might some day be worried for photographs again. Bluitt, the greatest agent the world has ever seen, who is my father and my mother in these matters, tells 'em all that I live in Spain and so we haven't been bothered for photographs for nearly three years. Still, if they *do* bother me again, I am ready." He paused in triumph. "Yes, I am ready for them. . . . From the local photographer (who, incidentally, is a very good one) I have bought seven excellent pictures of the station-master of Pelchester. He looks the part far better than ever I should, and everyone would be thoroughly satisfied—fine bushy beard and spectacles, massive, bulging torso, and fat, competent hands. Of course I've had to have the backgrounds and one or two details of attire touched up by those people in Bond Street, so that discord and suspicion need not be brought into the domestic peace of the station-master. . . ."

He was looking at Madeline Stringer as he talked; and he talked quite seriously, with enthusiasm and great pride.

"*Quite* hopeless," she said, and shrugged her shoulders again—this time in despair. "Of course you will have your own way. But I hate not being able to understand you, Hal. I wish you could make me agree with you. At the beginning, there might have been a great deal to be said for your motive. . . . Pride and bashfulness and all that kind of thing. . . . Not wanting people to know what you were doing in case you didn't succeed. But *now*, when you have succeeded so wonderfully. And think of the good it would do Cynthia for everyone to know that she is the daughter of Harold Rockleigh. . . .

Has it never occurred to you to think that it might really be only selfishness on your part to keep up the secrecy ? "

" When people begin to talk in that way about things being *really* only selfish," Petrie said, " they begin to talk nothing but nonsense. . . . Sentimentality, my dear. . . . What possible good could it do Cynthia to have me advertised as her father, and by accident the most popular dramatist of the century ? It could do nothing but impose all sorts of silly obligations upon her. It might, possibly, tickle her vanity a trifle, but that would only be a digression. Just as you are an actress, and I a dramatist, so Cynthia is by nature a musician. The exposure you suggest could no more affect her as an artist than it would affect you artistically to discover that your father was a wonderful jockey, or that your great-grandfather never would eat oysters. Quite seriously, though, the discovery would mean the very devil of a lot of trouble all round. It would mean the reorganisation of a tremendous lot of details, a lot of fuss and shifting things and readjusting to no purpose at all—since everyone of us is as happy as they ever can be. Cynthia can't afford to waste time on that kind of nonsense now; she is at a critical stage of her artistic development. . . ."

" What about yourself, Hal ? " she asked softly. " Are you quite satisfied with—with this ? "

The smoke from the unaccustomed cigarette was giving him a lot of trouble, tickling his nostrils and burning his eyes. He blinked and puffed and crushed the cigarette into the little brass ash-tray at his elbow. " No," he said slowly, " of course I'm not satisfied, Maddie, with—this, or with anything else. Are you ? Have we ever *been* satisfied with anything ? You know you haven't. But it isn't your fault or mine. It's this particular life of ours that's at fault. It's too small for a whole person. We can't get everything into it. It is, by its nature, pathetic and—tragic. We work, you and I, and it isn't enough. We play for a while, and play isn't enough. We love, Madgie—and love isn't quite enough. Taken all three together or in turn, it still isn't enough. There is still something in us outside them all that goes on, craving and unsatisfied. It's life, I tell you—it just isn't *enough*—you know what I

mean, even if I haven't said it with my usual lucidity. What good could it do now for me to revolutionise the routine of half a dozen lives by telling people that a man to whom they are very closely related is not a successful bootseller and egg-buyer, but a successful playwright? None. It would make not a straw's difference to you, my dear. To me, if you still insist on sentimentality, it would make the very devil of a lot of difference. I am getting positive good out of this arrangement. I am not in any way ashamed to admit it, since I am not stealing it from anyone else. I knew I should get it. In fact I set out in the first instance to get it. Most people only manage to get one life out of a lifetime; I, by a little ingenuity, have managed to get three. First, there is 'our Mr Petrie,' who only a very few know left 'us' some years ago to go into 'some other business.' And I say, Madge, you can't imagine how amazingly Mrs Petrie's turned out, with her two grandsons in Pelchester and two daughters in London, her son whose voice is at last settling into the bass clef without undue use of ledger lines, and the husband of whom she is no longer ashamed since he appears to be earning more money than his son-in-law, and more money certainly than she knows how to spend. There is the other life, run by the amazing Miss Stark and her typewriter. Do you know she made me sign seventeen letters before I got away from her this morning? She also made me go and see Bluitt again about the Spanish copyright of the 'First Refusal.' It's a great life, you know, Maddie, that one—even by itself. And then—then—there's—there's this one to which I always drift back when the other two have been emptied—and this one is never emptied. Lord, my dear, I'm glad though that we never quite lost sight of the fact that work meant so much to us."

"To some people it is everything," she remarked, with just the faintest suspicion of bitterness in her emphasis of the last word.

"Naturally," said Petrie. "To others eating is everything, or collecting postage stamps or butterflies. But to people of sense like you and me, Maddie, it is not everything nor even nearly everything; it is just the *sine qua non*. It's the same, I'm as sure as I can be, with Cynthia and that funny little sister of hers."

"Well," said Madeline. She indicated that she had no more to say, or that she realised that saying it would be quite useless. "It's time we thought about lunch. I'm sure I don't know what I shall talk to those two about; Cynthia has so very little to say, and Freda, full of her votes for women, is sure to make me feel perfectly silly with her talk of Harold Rockleigh. She is the one of the two, if you want to know my opinion, who has got the most in her."

"She simply happens not to be the artist of the two," said Petrie with a smile, "hence my preference for Cynthia, I suppose. I must admit, too, that with Cynthia I have a schoolgirl, sentimental kind of feeling that she is doing for me what I promised to do for myself—and didn't. That is why I am so desperately anxious for her to go on, uninterrupted. There's a deuce of a lot to be said in music, you know, Madge, that hasn't been said, and I believe that she might get some of it said. By the way, she ought to have had an offer by now from Wilkes and Toppitt for a little tour. I'd like her to take it; so you might put in a word if she says anything. There isn't a great deal of money in it, but she would be with good people—old stagers. . . ."

"What would Freda do while she's gone?" asked Madge.

"That's just the point," Petrie snapped. "That menage ought to be interrupted for a bit. I was afraid that those two might be getting tied up to their furniture and their flat. That is slavery, my dear girl, and must not be allowed in the life of an artist or striver of any sort. It's just as bad for one of them as it is for the other."

He stood up and leaned against the mantelpiece. The quiet, meditative tones went from his voice, and he became militant. "What will Freda do? She can do anything she jolly well pleases except hang on to Cynthia. And you needn't smile like that; it isn't favouritism—I wouldn't suggest Freda's being sacrificed to Cynthia either. Let 'em both be *free*, Madge—free, *free*."

"Funny old Hal," said Madge, quietly; "let's go into lunch, or there will be a risk of their running into you. I didn't mean to stir you up, my old boy. . . ." She slipped her arm into his and led him to the door.

"Stir me up!" said he, smiling down upon her. "I should think it does stir me up! I only wish it stirred more people up as it does me. You *must* keep this thing secret. There is nothing in the way of any of us now. We are all free. . . . Free of the carking, cramping anxiety about ways and means, free as possible of each other, and free of other people. Let it go on. Let them have the chance that so many other people miss, the chance of going straight for their objective, my dear—there is nothing in the way now. Only bungling on our part can entangle things for them, and make responsibilities and obligations that can be very simply avoided."

Once more Madeline was convinced that every word he said was true. She knew that when he was gone she would doubt again; she knew she would agree with Jefferson that it was largely nonsense—merely the obsession of an eccentric mind. But she knew that she agreed with him now, and that she always would agree with him, as long as he was there to convince her.

She also knew exactly how much use there would be in arguing with him, if she did not agree.

"I've explained all that to you before, though, Maddie," he said as they went into the dining-room. "But what good ever came out of an argument with a woman? You continue to think that I am a fool."

"It never even occurs to me to think whether you are a fool or not, Hal," she said. "What does it matter? *I* shouldn't be any the wiser. But I would hate to risk going against you in this thing. They shall both have their chance as far as *I* am concerned; of that you may be quite sure."

"That's the kind of remark," said Petrie, "that makes me wonder why you devote so much time to arguing and trying to pick a quarrel with me. . . ."

§ 2

After about three more weeks of work, Petrie sat one morning and smiled and whistled disjointedly, and idly stared at a page that held only a few lines of his neat handwriting.

At the end of the last line he very slowly made a full stop. He continued twiddling the pen about upon it, spreading the circumference of the blob till the full stop became a great bead of bulging ink. Noticing the mess he was making, he began, very delicately, to blot it. But it smudged: some of the ink squirted upwards, and one streak downwards. The upward smear he converted with his pen into the semblance of a tall hat, the downward one into a leg. He added a second leg, arms and a walking-stick. But the thing was once more a menace of bulging ink. Petrie stared at it quietly, and then very devoutly said "Damn!"

He would not again risk blotting-paper upon it, so he set to work drying it by gentle blowing; but the task was too long a one. He digressed from it to print, in scratchy, clumsy capitals, the word "CURTAIN." . . .

Petrie was, in fine, idling; messing about. . . .

He had written the last word of the last act of his new play; and whatever else he might alter or take out or put in, he knew that those last words would stand. So he sat waiting, as it were, for his rifle to cool.

In the "C" of "Curtain" he began to draw his impression of a cobweb; then he flung down his pen and said, "What *you* want, O Dramatist, is a bit of chalk and a nice new piece of fence to make a mess of. You'd better get out before you do some damage."

He put on his hat, and looked out over the roofs of Pelchester.

He had been very comfortably established in those two rooms high above a furniture repository in the High Street for nearly four years. The outer room served only as a buffer. It was empty save for the jagged tin lining of a packing-case, into which he occasionally emptied his waste-paper basket and his ash-tray. The inner one, his study, contained a desk, three chairs, a couple of book-cases and a small cupboard that kept all his loose papers neatly out of sight. Everything except the books (which he had carried over two or three at a time from the old study at home) had been sent up from the shop below him, so that the whole move into the place had been accomplished within four walls.

There were only two paintings on the walls—little things

that James had given him, and a medallion sketch of Jefferson by Count Dovod Osobisty.

The two heavy silver frames on his desk sounded a note, therefore, that was not answered by anything else in the room. A cracked soup plate between them was the receptacle for Petrie's ashes and match ends.

In one frame was a photograph of Madeline Stringer, in the other, one of Cynthia. He had often placed these pictures side by side and pondered upon the contrast they presented—a contrast heightened by the photographs themselves.

Madeline's was the work of a West End artist with every device of the studio to help him. Every light was softened, every shadow illuminated by reflected lights till every detail, to the very texture of the skin, was there.

Cynthia's was an enlargement out of a picnic group taken near Holzgarten on her twenty-first birthday, when the cloudless sunshine beat fiercely down upon her forehead and her cheekbones, upon the bridge of her nose and the point of her chin. The rest was sharp, black shadow. . . . Looking at it, Petrie always shook his head, knowing that one day he would let just one man more into the secret of his two lives, and commission Osobisty to do a head of her. . . .

From the photograph of Madeline, wide-open eyes looked out at him and smiled—eyes that had looked out upon life, and learned many things from the seeing.

In Cynthia's, shadows hid the eyes that had as yet seen nothing—eyes, as far as he had been able to make out, that had no particular concern with seeing things.

As he strolled across the room, he stopped to have another look at the photograph, and the only thing he could be positively sure of was that he did not as yet understand Cynthia. In fact, he could make neither head nor tail of her. He had taken her to see " The First Refusal " and she had said that it was cruelly sad. He had taken her to " Strivers All," and she had said in exactly and precisely the same tones that it was howlingly funny.

Madeline never said things in that kind of tone. . . . Madeline had said, incidentally, that Cynthia was rather a stick: and Petrie had asked her, hotly, what on earth she had expected:

Cynthia was a *bona fide* artist, a contemplator of things for the *things'* sake and not her own : an artist, a contemplator—not just a reacter. Madeline had said that that was all very well, but that there were *limits*. To that no answer was possible.

Then Madeline had said that she could not, as a matter of fact, imagine what Jefferson could see in Cynthia, when *Freda* was there—actually on the spot : and Petrie had said "Damn Jefferson." But he said it, not peevishly or lightly ; he said it very deliberately and earnestly, for he knew that now, in addition to the enigma of Cynthia which interested him, was the problem of Jefferson that worried him.

For a whole fortnight it had worried him and it worried him still.

"Oh damn the fellow!" he said again, for the hundredth time in those two weeks ; and he smiled at the effigy of Jefferson, the friend he had found just as he had decided that friendship was a logical absurdity.

From the effigy he looked at the profile of Cynthia that one day he would have to place before Osobisty—clean-chiselled, strong, and still as marble—at the closed lips that said so little, at the eyes that seemed to see not, at the ear half-hidden in a coil of hair—the only organ that he could be quite sure functioned lustily.

Funny creature, Cyn. . . .

. . . . . .

§ 3

Mrs Petrie and Conrad had started lunch when he got home. His place was laid, distinguished from the other two by a colossal tea-cup ; but his absence from the meal would have occasioned no more comment than did his coming in to it.

Mrs Petrie smiled placidly and helped him to a piece of steak.

"By the way, Elizabeth," he said, "I told you, didn't I, that Jefferson will be down to-night for a day or two ?"

"Yes," said Mrs Petrie, "the room's quite ready. But

you haven't forgotten that the girls come down on Monday, before Cynthia goes off on her tour ? . . . If Mr Jefferson wants to stay on you could . . ."

" Oh, he won't want to stay," said Petrie. " We only have a little business to talk over. . . . Gone by Sunday night at the latest I should say."

They both talked in the calm, matter-of-fact tones of people who have nothing but matters of fact to communicate to each other, and whose time in each other's society is well in excess of the amount of information they have to impart. The tones, in short, of people who have been married (and not uncomfortably so) for many years.

" About the question of a maid, Charles," Mrs Petrie said.

Now there was, in point of fact, no question whatever of a maid. A maid had never in all their two lives been mentioned by either one of them before ; but that is how Mrs Petrie began the subject, illustrating the perfectly ordinary and even tenor of their existence.

" You see, Mrs Simpson is not what she used to be. You would think there was little enough for her to do, in all conscience, but the cooking alone is about as much as she can manage now."

" Quite," said Petrie. " Such consistency as hers is enough to age anyone. I don't believe she's missed a day since . . ."

" It isn't a *necessity*," Mrs Petrie went on ; " I don't mean *that* ; but it would be a great convenience with people dropping in the way they do nowadays. Like Doctor Jefferson. . . ."

" I shouldn't think you would find much difficulty in getting a maid," said Petrie.

" I've got my eye on one," said Mrs Petrie, quietly. " I can afford her out of the housekeeping allowance, unless, of course, the girls' place . . . I mean, the housekeeping allowance is a great deal larger than it *need* be, Charles—unless we *do* go in for a maid."

" Oh, by all means we must go in for a maid," said Petrie, his eyes twinkling through narrowed lids. " Capital piece of beef this, Elizabeth. We—I—that is to say the firm . . . I've had a *rise*, you know. At least, I am about to have a rise. We have got into touch with Spain at last." He found it

tremendously amusing to allude, in this way, to the fact that the Spanish royalties of "The First Refusal" had begun to trickle into Bluitt's office. "Please don't delay unduly in engaging the maid, Elizabeth. I am in a great hurry. I look forward to arousing the jealousy and envy of my son-in-law."

"My dear," said Mrs Petrie; "you misjudge poor George. I'm sure you do."

"It will be huge fun," Petrie continued, chuckling. "We must have them to dine one night, nothing having been said, and we will face them with a maid, all starched up. . . . Poor old George! I am upsetting all the poor fellow's calculations and forecasts. But how soon can you get a maid?"

"As a matter of fact," said Mrs Petrie; "there's a girl coming in to-morrow—just to try." She tried to be ever so casual about the statement, but her excitement was patent. Conrad, too, was as negligent as could be of the topic; but he was interested.

Petrie sat back in his chair. First he stared at them; then grinned. Then he said: "Now observe. I am about to trump that. My statement will knock the wind utterly out of your two sails. As for George, well, I shrink from imagining what it will do to George. My statement is this, I propose to buy a motor-car."

Mrs Petrie just stared at him. If he had said a brace of elephants instead of a motor-car she could not have stared at him harder. (People were still inclined to dress themselves up in those days—in fantastic caps and coats and gauntlets before they attempted to drive a motor-car.)

Finally she said "Charles!"

Conrad had not moved a muscle. "Well, young fellah?" said Petrie to him.

"What make?" said Conrad, with astonishingly cold composure.

"By Jove!" said Petrie; "I suppose that *is* a question; but I must say it had never occurred to me. I had only considered motor-cars quite broadly as nothing but just motor-cars. I suppose there is something in the suggestion, though. . . ."

All Conrad deigned to say was, " I wish *I* had the selling of this car to you, pater."

Petrie bowed to him.

" It's a mighty ticklish thing, let me tell you," said Conrad loftily, " —the buying of a car."

" Oh *that's* how the effect is got, is it ? " said Petrie ; " by saying simply ' car ' instead of ' motor-car ' ? Yes. I must say that it does give a fine touch of familiarity and ease to it, old man."

" You can say what you please about a Joynson or any of the other cheap stuff," said Conrad, with a contempt for Petrie's jocularity that was superb. " But if you ask *me*—there is only *one* car worth having on the market at the present moment. I mean one *English* car."

Petrie made another obeisance to him. " O sage," said he, " live for ever. In this matter thou shalt be as my right-hand man, my grand vizier. In fourteen days from hence, or peradventure twenty-one, we shall fare us together to London, to Birmingham or whither else soever are the great bazaars of the chariot-makers. There, with gold we will get us a good chariot both fleet and stout. *Together*, I say, will we do this thing. But let it be told to us, O sage, whence comes to thee this new-gat chariot-lore ? "

" There's nothing new about it," said Conrad. He had suddenly become conscious of himself, and confused and awkward. Fidgeting with the bread beside his plate he went on : " and there isn't very much lore to speak of. I—I just happen to take a bit of an interest in cars and engines and—and all that sort of thing. I thought perhaps, a bit later on—I might . . ." He was blushing ; words seemed positively to stick in his throat. Finally, the word " engineer " was just barely distinguishable in his mumblings.

And then, at a single stroke, Petrie put everything in the world right by saying, " Good for you. . . . So now your profession is settled, too. I had hoped that the mysteries of medicine might lure you—science ; *surgery*, to be quite exact. But have it your own way, as long as it's something with brains in it somewhere. . . . I don't suppose there's very much difference between the two, *after* all. . . ."

Then they digressed, talking of Cynthia's tour, of the impending birthday present for George the younger, of Freda's appointment, and of the maid. Conrad's complexion became slowly normal again.

"I say, pater," he said, carelessly departing. "You weren't just rotting by any chance were you?"

"I was not," said Petrie. "Give me about three weeks. I'm devilish busy for the next three weeks."

"Rather!" said Conrad; "but this will give young Harbottle some food for whistling, I can tell you—with that precious new Joynson cab of theirs. By the way, I've got a few jolly interesting papers and some catalogues and things kicking about in my room which we might have a look at one evening when you've done with this heavy job of yours."

Petrie said, "Yes, rather. I'll have lots of time quite soon," and Conrad drifted out.

"Quaint bird, that, Elizabeth," said Petrie, smiling at the closed door. "The quaintest, I think, of the whole brood. I must say he makes a very good show out of the tragedy of being nearly seventeen . . . but where on earth did he get his engineering turn of mind from? . . . blest if *I* could ever tell the difference between a spanner and a sprocket. . . . Pity he doesn't want to be a surgeon: still, thank God it's something, Elizabeth—some ambition in addition to that of merely growing. . . ."

"Yes," said Mrs Petrie, "yes indeed—we have a great deal to be thankful for, Charles. It is a pity—it would have been splendid for the boy to become a doctor. But still, as you say, we must be thankful for small mercies. . . . If only it could have been even *civil* engineering, where he would not have to mix with mechanics and people of that sort. But Charles—were you serious, really serious about the motor-car—about *buying* one, I mean?"

"Why not?" asked Petrie with a shrug and a smile.

"*Because* . . ." said Mrs Petrie; "well—because it seems such a strange kind of thing to do. *I* should never have dreamt of such a thing. . . . To begin with, it must cost—well, to say the least of it, some hundreds of pounds; you intend, apparently, to buy a *brand new* one."

"A motor-car," said Petrie, "—I should say a 'kah'—can cost some thousands of pounds." She looked steadily at him while he filled his pipe. Her mood was vague; she felt a little baffled. He suddenly looked up at her and smiled. She was still baffled, but felt less vague after the smile.

"You are a funny fellow, Charles," she said, and she too smiled. "It would be so very easy to misunderstand you now—the way you just say nothing at all, and then suddenly fling down all this money. It would be very easy to think that you only do it that way to punish me for the way I worried about these things, only I don't think that. You see, you've never been *spiteful*, Charles. . . ."

This kind of thing was a surprise to Petrie. He began to feel a little as though he wanted to move about. "No. It isn't spite, Elizabeth," he said, tugging hard at his pipe. "I—I'm awfully glad you see that. It's—it's nothing more than habit, I think; just a sort of habit of mind. Just commonsense really. . . . You must face the facts of the case, Elizabeth. It never really worked for you to worry yourself and me about what I was doing. . . ."

"But I can't help worrying about it even now," said Mrs Petrie. "I try to reckon it all up . . . there's the girls' place, and here—and all your own expenses; First Class, some one told George, though George says that in business all travelling expenses are usually more than paid. . . ."

"They are," said Petrie; "George is quite right; they are. One thing I *can* tell you, Elizabeth. You have nothing whatever to worry about in that way. I would have told you that much—long ago—only I was afraid that it might worry you. . . . New idea, you know. . . . It's usually when you tell people the full and exact truth—if it happens to be at all incredible—that they begin to lose faith in you. My—work—er—is remunerative and, it is not hard. . . ."

"But it is hard," said Mrs Petrie, "and that, too, I worry about. I am *forced* to worry about it. You take no rest. You are always at work, it seems to me. It—it hurts me to see it . . ." Her eyes began to sparkle. "You—you seem to have utterly stifled all the music that was in you; un—unless it's *I* that have done that. I remember what you once . . ."

"Please don't remember anything, Elizabeth," Petrie said quietly; "you——" He had a piece of deep philosophy to give her; but the way he gave it was, "you must just take things as they come. . . . And don't ever worry about me. I manage, as a matter of fact, to hear a good deal of music in the course of my knocking about. I—I—in short, Elizabeth, I have a very good time of it. Don't worry about *me*. If you can manage to have a fairly good time, too, I—I should be very much happier. . . ."

"But I *must* worry about you, Charles," she said. "It hurts me for you to have to work so. It isn't necessary. We don't need motor-cars and things. There's only Conrad now and a little still needed for the girls. Why not work a little less hard? I know how you used to be able to enjoy little things. I know how such unremitting work must—must go against your grain. . . ."

Petrie had more philosophy on this subject. The way he communicated it this time was by "Fiddlesticks, Elizabeth!" Then he stretched out his hand and patted hers. Laughing, he said, "And I wish you would not make me feel such an infernal idiot. Nice thing it would be for Mrs Simpson to come in and find us staring at each other with damp eyes. And what would Conrad think—a brace of grandparents, Elizabeth—greyheaded ancestors of an apparently inexhaustible line. . . ."

"Yes," said Mrs Petrie, "but——"

"This time," said Petrie, "there are no buts."

"There is just this one," said Mrs Petrie; "you need not do so *much*. It makes my heart ache with bitterness and self-reproach to see how you must have to write and write and *write* to make so much money. If you are not in your offices here, you are in London, or rushing off to London or rushing back again. I know how miserable just a few hours a week of such work used to make you years ago, and now. . . . Well, at least you owe yourself a rest. You are not exactly a young man still, are you, Charles? . . . You don't want to wear yourself *out*. . . ."

"Because you happen to have grown a good deal younger in the last five years," said Petrie, "there is no reason for you

to insult *my* grey hairs. Besides, I might mention in passing that it is on the quality of my work as much as on its quantity that I am remunerated. And as for making things a little easier—that is where the car comes in. . . ."

He smiled at her again, the smile that cheered and warmed her. She shook her head, and said, "Well, thank goodness that *one* of us has still got some sense! I don't mind telling you that with your ideas of housekeeping expenses, I have been able to put away enough to make me feel easy about a rainy day."

Petrie patted the top of her head as he went out. "If I could be absolutely sure of not distressing you by the information," he said, "I would announce that we shall very soon be beyond the reach of rainy days altogether. When once one begins to do business in *Spain*—well, I'll bring young Jefferson in at about seven."

. . . . . .

§ 4

At six o'clock, Petrie was seated again in the study above the furniture shop. Opposite him, smoking a pipe as poisonous as Petrie's own, sat the man whom he always spoke of as "young" Jefferson.

Jefferson was, in point of fact, forty. He looked anything from twenty to sixty—clean, careless, and profound.

His flannel suit and striped necktie linked him with undergraduates; his lean, chiselled features, his hollow cheeks and high, wide forehead made one wonder which, after all, told the truth about Jefferson—his face, or his shoes and trousers and necktie.

Petrie and he had been arguing—about it and about. They had got through three pipes apiece, and had come to no conclusion whatever.

"There's only one way of looking at it, Jeff," Petrie said, as he leaned back to fill his fourth pipe. "Every other way is specious and not exactly honest. The thing ought never to have happened, and it never would have happened if you had not been, after all your *years* of talk—nothing but an idiot; an abysmal idiot."

"Rot, my dear fellow," said Jefferson; "no one would agree with you there—not on the simple facts of the case, apart from any personal application of them. You see, you yourself think that Cynthia is the most wonderful woman—oh very well, *girl* then—in the world. I merely share your view. Only, not being her father, I am a good deal more excited and enthusiastic over the discovery than you are. There is nothing for me to tell you about my own personal feelings in the matter that you do not already know—even though you are incapable of taking a straightforward, level-headed view of the thing, with that infernal bee you have in your bonnet."

"To blazes with your own personal feelings," Petrie snapped. "Who cares about your *feelings*. It's the principle of the thing that we are concerned with. And it's a principle with which you have always agreed."

"As a principle," Jefferson agreed, "as a *rule*—the thing's true enough. But *you* have always agreed that it's only the fools that can't prove themselves exceptions to principles and rules. *You* have proved yourself an exception, and—and Madeline. Does your companionship do her any harm as a personality, as an *artist*—which you are always trying to emphasise so much? Are you any the . . ."

"Companionship!" said Petrie; "Bah! we are not discussing companionship, man—we are discussing *marriage*. I wish you'd try to stick to the point."

"Same idea," said Jefferson.

"Good God!" said Petrie; "and *you*—a thinker—can make a remark of that quality? Play the game, Jeff, play the game; be *honest*, old fellow."

"Oh, I'm honest enough, Hal," Jefferson said wearily. "I'm in love with Cynthia, right enough; and I've never for a moment tried to deny that. . . . All the old business—insomnia, loss of appetite, restlessness and incessant loafing about in the hopes of catching just a glimpse of her. I allow you all that, old man—plans for further loafing, extended as far as provincial concert halls for the next few weeks. . . . I don't deny a word of that, but damn it, man! look here! . . . I'm sorry you force one to speak to you like this—but what about you—and Madeline?"

Twice already he had asked this same question. Both times he had apologised for asking it. Both times he had blushed. Once Petrie had answered, "Why not try to stick to the point, Jeff?" The second time he had said, just as quietly, "Don't be a fool."

This time he said nothing at all.

Suddenly, in the silence of gently swaying, blue smoke, Jefferson banged his knuckles on the desk and burst out, "Look here, Hal! I'll be *honest*. I'm just as interested in this confounded principle of yours as you are. You *know* that—and you know, too, where I have always disagreed with you. You think the whole thing is nothing but varying degrees of vitality in people that makes one of them eat up the life out of another. I don't—altogether. It's very largely sex to my mind, and nothing more. But what I say *now* is—*damn* the principle. Damn all principles; what we have to deal with now is *fact*, old fellow, not *principles*. The fact we've got to deal with is that I'm just a man, Hal, and that I'm just simply in love with Cynthia. Principles? Theories? . . . I'm just a man. I know nothing now about cerebellums and ganglia and nodes and opsonic indexes or sympathetic nervous systems any more. . . . You and your precious theories of the Drama, and the Unity of Art. . . . I don't care a fig for a single word of it all. It hasn't anything to do with anything. It's rubbish, sheer rubbish, every bit of it. It's nothing to me. I'm a man. Just a man now." He got up and strode to the window, and from the window to the door. "A *man*, I said; did you hear me? And what's more, I'm a piffling idiot to talk to you about the thing at all. D'you think I'd waste my time and yours doing it if I had any more than about fivepence farthing in the world? . . . Two hundred a year doesn't go very far even after you've added in the few stray guineas that emerge out of my precious practice. Oh no; I see the wrong of *poverty* clearly enough, Hal—and that is just where you get me. It's only that that makes it possible for you to highbrow-beat me. If it wasn't for just *that*—well, you would *see*. . . ."

"The young people," said Petrie, with a grin, "would doubtless elope."

"It must be easy to sit there being humorous," snapped Jefferson.

"You know," said Petrie quietly, "that you would do no such idiotic thing as elope, old fellow; and you know that it is not your two hundred a year that is stopping you now. It is just the vestiges that still survive from what was once your common sense. It is the 'principle.' You still believe in the principle and you can't, in spite of all your efforts, get away from it. You know it would be wrong—fundamentally and utterly wrong—for anyone to try to butt in on Cynthia now, and to go and harness her personality to another. Why, hang it all—you would just have to foist yourself upon her. . . ."

One of the finest thinkers in England snapped out, "Rot! Damned rot!"

"It isn't rot," said Petrie quietly; "so just sit down and let us talk the thing over, Jeff. I'm reasonable enough about it. . . ."

"Reasonable!" Jefferson exclaimed. "You have talked more nonsense in the last hour than I would ever have believed you capable of. It's nothing but sheer impudence of you to try to lay down the law to me like this. Good Lord, man! I'm old enough to be a grandfather like you are, and here—thanks to *principles* and a lot of dessicated rubbish, here I am still a loafing old bachelor dribbling my life away in a lot of worthless gossip with a few artists, actors, and other social parasites. I've omitted even to earn a decent livelihood, to make a place for a grand woman and some kids. You're wrong, Hal—hopelessly and fatuously wrong, old fellow." His face sank into his hands.

A few moments Petrie looked at him, his head tilted back, his chin and lower lip thrust forward to project the clouds of smoke away from his eyes. Then he said very gently, "I'm not envying you this business, you know, Jeff. I know there isn't a great deal of fun in it for you; I'm no fool as far as that goes. . . . And—and I've got the very devil of a suspicion—and experience only tends to confirm it—that it's a losing fight, this 'Life' business. Winning or losing—you're almost bound to lose. . . . Sorry for the snappy piece of dialogue,

old man, but it's devilish true. And there's Cynthia: you haven't told me yet—I mean, does she really——"

"And how the blazes can I have said anything to Cynthia?"

Jefferson sat upright in his chair to say this. "Worthless rotter that I am with my two hundred a year inherited from my old father's business of compiling and printing popular, inaccurate maps. . . . Of *course* I haven't said anything to Cynthia yet. What sort of a fellow do you take me for? . . . I've been trying to knock a little life into the rotten old practice first. . . ."

"H'm. . . . *General* practice?" asked Petrie.

"General practice be hanged!" said Jefferson. "Neurology—so-called. I've looked up most of the old crowd, and written to the others, telling them I'm having the old brass plate shined up once more, after several years of study. They've all promised to help and send patients along. . . . Lord! man, I could have been a biggish swell by now. . . ."

"You could," Petrie admitted. "But it's not such a highly reputable profession after all. There's a good deal of the tinker in it, you know—patching up rubbishy old pots that would be far better scrapped."

"H'm," Jefferson grunted. "*You* could quite well have been scrapped some years ago, when you came along with a brain that was just beginning to spring a leak. . . ."

"If repairing leaky brains consists in swilling pints of beer with the patient and smoking several stone of tobacco over a lot of talk—well, all I can say is, that you are a most conscientious healer. Furthermore, if that is the case, there *is* something to be said for the trade. . . . But look here, Jeff. I can only ask you one thing. Can you—*will* you wait? Don't go and upset the girl now. Let her, at least, get this tour of hers over and see what comes of it. Let her get at least an impetus towards fresh work first. Give her a chance. That much I do ask of you." In a few moments Petrie had become merely an elderly man—wistful and diffident—making a very earnest request.

"You can rest assured of that," said Jefferson, still bowed over his hands. "You're safe enough there, Hal. I'm dumb till there's some sign of life stirring in the practice. . . ."

Petrie pulled out his watch and looked at it.

Jefferson pulled out his; but both of them, as a fact, omitted to notice what o'clock it was.

Petrie then stretched his arms and yawned. "Well," he said, "I got as far as the word 'curtain' this morning."

"I know," said Jefferson; "I noticed the sheet lying there. And your printing made me wonder how a man of your intelligence on most other points should come to have so little idea of design. A barmaid could have done a far more decorative thing than that. One would think that an observant man like yourself would have observed, among other things, that there is an art of lettering. Of course, the old man very early drew *my* attention to it with his gaudy maps. . . . So it's finished then, is it?"

"Well, I've got through to the end," said Petrie. "There's yards to come out yet, and a good deal to go in. It'll take ten days or so hard at it with Miss Stark before it's legible enough for you to have a look at."

"'S it any good?" asked Jefferson; "up to expectations?"

"There's some first-class stuff in it, Jeff. Some of the very real thing. All tragedy—tragedy, every syllable of it, and not a drop of blood—either 'on' or 'off.' Madeline will be immense in it—you just mark my words, positively *immense*; and she's never had a show in real tragedy yet. It only remains to be seen whether the great B. Public can swallow first-class tragedy as it has swallowed first-class comedy. . . ."

Thus they chatted on for half an hour.

Petrie gathered up the few sheets that lay loose upon his desk and added them to the pile in a drawer. Then he took out the pile and shuffled it about in his hands, glancing at a page here, turning over a dozen, sketching out for Jefferson's benefit the matter they contained, trying to get Jefferson to visualise the tragedy and grasp it as he himself visualised and grasped it.

He pulled out his watch, and this time saw that it was after seven o'clock.

They got up to go.

Petrie went first; through the empty "buffer" room and down the dark, carpetless stairs. Jefferson, carrying his suitcase, followed.

"Oh, by the way," he said; "Madeline said to mention to you that old Antipon met Freda the other night at some Cocoa party or other in Chelsea. It was only the merest fluke that Cynthia wasn't there to give your show away with her long hands—and her cheekbones and forehead. . . . Oh yes, and the Chaffinch says that that little Spring Song she plays by that Russian Johnnie is nothing but a crib from an unpublished thing of Grieg's or some one's."

"Crib his grandmother!" snapped Petrie. "That Chaffinch ought to . . ." But Petrie never finished prescribing a suitable destiny for London's foremost musical critic. Upon the third or fourth step from the bottom, he stumbled awkwardly. He flung out a hand for the banister, but just missed it. His legs folded under him, his arms comically fanned the air, and he came down, with a bump that echoed through the hush of the warehouse, upon the last step. From this he slid to the stone landing.

Jefferson had dropped his suit-case, and in an instant was beside him.

"Silly idiot," said Petrie slowly, and then very solemnly, "Damn."

"How the deuce 'd you manage to do a thing like that?" Jefferson complained. "People have been known to break their necks. . . ."

"You are the best of fellows in a tight corner, Jeff," said Petrie. "Information like that is quite invaluable. Only the scientific mind can grasp such strong stuff as that, and —Ooch! . . ." Wincing, he shot a hand round to the small of his back. "Friend Kimber, my landlord and neighbour, has shod his stairs with tempered steel—*I* ought to know, having sat down on them at thirty-two feet per second per second."

He sat quite still, till Jefferson stooped a little lower and said: "I believe you *have* hurt yourself, old fellow!" He held out a helping hand.

Petrie waved it aside and said, "With your very kind indulgence I will sit where I am for a moment and recover a little of the breath that got pumped out of me. . . . This is all rot, you know; *you* are the fellow that ought to have suffered this particular indignity (with impact), after your particular

mission of this afternoon. . . . *There* you are ! " Still ignoring Jefferson's hand, he scrambled to his feet, holding on to the banisters. Then he very slowly and deliberately sat down again.

" Hell ! " he said ; " it *did* knock the wind out of me."

Jefferson stared down at him, puzzled. " Better go up again for a minute or two and have a breather. I noticed a bottle of something or other on the cupboard."

" Capital idea ! " said Petrie. " You trot ahead and light up and pour out. I—I'll come along in a minute, when—when I've found my stick."

" Here's your stick," said Jefferson, picking it up ; " and here's my arm. Hang on."

Together they went up the two flights.

Petrie sat down at the desk while Jefferson lighted the gas and went to the bottle of whisky that stood on the cupboard with glasses and a syphon of soda-water.

Pouring out the drinks, he stole a glance at Petrie.

He was sitting with legs crossed, and head slightly lowered. He drummed with one hand upon the desk-top ; with the other he flicked the dust off his trouser-legs.

Jefferson placed a glass at his elbow, and raised his own. " Well—here's to us," he said.

" Ah—*yes*," said Petrie, a little absently. " Good luck, Jeff," but he did not immediately move.

Jefferson said, quite suddenly, " I say, Hal—devilish funny the way you just doubled up like that on the stairs ! "

" Odd sense of fun some people have," said Petrie drily.

" Joking apart, old man," Jefferson went on solemnly, " what on earth made you do it ? I didn't like it. . . ."

" Seven pounds, nine shillings and fourpence made me do it," said Petrie, " and I didn't like it either. The fact is that our Mr Kimber downstairs did not like the idea of an additional premium of seven pounds, nine shillings and fourpence, which he would have had to pay if he had had a gas-jet put on those infernal stairs. . . . Odd how *Life* Insurance people never go into these details of illumination. . . ."

" *Devilish* funny ! " Jefferson repeated absently. " Feet didn't *slip*, you know . . . they came *backwards* a bit. . . .

A tack sticking up in the stairs would have done it; or a nail in the sole of your boot. . . . Got a nail or a screw or anything sticking out in the sole of your boot, Hal?" He stooped as though to examine it.

Petrie shoved him away. "Time we were getting along," he said. "I rather pride myself on punctuality at home."

"Steady just one moment," said Jefferson. He quickly smoothed the trouser-leg over Petrie's uppermost knee-cap, and drew back his hand, hatchet-wise, to strike the cartilage.

"Don't be such an old woman, Jeff!" said Petrie. He stood up, resting a hand on the desk. "We'll have to sprint most of the way as it is."

"*Hal*," said Jefferson, "honestly, I didn't like the look of it one bit. Sit down and let's have a look."

"Ass!" said Petrie. "Tinker! . . . Come along."

But he remained still, resting his weight upon the desk. Jefferson sprang suddenly to his side and grabbed his arm.

"Why the hell don't you walk, then?" he said, shaking him. "*Move!* Don't stand there, larking like a fool. . . ."

He was looking, intently, at his feet and knees. He did not, therefore, see the way Petrie shut his teeth together and stared, unflinching at his Fate.

In the fraction of an instant it was all over. Petrie lifted his hand from the desk and strode carelessly across the room.

"H'm," said Jefferson, trying not to feel a fool. "Alright. Come back now. . . . Shut your eyes."

"Yes," said Petrie, ignoring the last suggestion, "and leave an unfinished drink within striking distance of Billy Jefferson, M.D."

He laughed loudly at his joke and finished his drink.

As they walked along the street, Petrie turned suddenly to Jefferson and said: "I say, Jeff, you're not *still* mumbling to yourself about my cropper, are you?—I mean, well—I'm walking *perfectly*, you see . . . and if I can *walk*. . . ."

"Oh Lord, yes," said Jefferson; "might have hurt yourself, though. . . . Just hang on to this while I get a light." He handed his suit-case to Petrie, and stopped to put a match to his pipe. Petrie swung ahead with the load, and Jefferson, over his sheltering hands, peered after him.

"*That's* right enough!" he mumbled; ". . . I suppose a man's foot can slip backwards just as well as forwards . . . nothing wrong with *that*. . . ." He ran up to Petrie and took back his suit-case.

"Oh no," he said. "I thought for a moment you might have snapped your patella across. . . . It's a jolly easy thing to do. . . ."

. . . . . .

Over their night-cap that evening, Petrie said, "What do you know about motor-cars, Jeff?"

Jefferson said it was three years since he had driven one.

"What do you think of a Joynson?" said Petrie; "I mean, just as a *car*."

Jefferson said, "It was a Joynson that I drove. They were not bad, as things went in those days. But . . ."

Petrie solemnly nodded. "I know," he said; "but there is only one car on the market at the present time."

"One *British* car," Jefferson corrected him; and Petrie roared with laughter. "Bless my soul!" said he, "experts of every blessed kind are made with absolutely the same stamp, the world over."

"What on earth's the joke now?" asked Jefferson.

Petrie told him; and they agreed to meet, when Petrie was ready, and go with Conrad to buy the car.

Chapter Two

§ 1

IT was about three weeks later that Jefferson was rung up by Cartwright, who had been at Bart's with him, and now had a practice in Balham.

He wanted Jefferson to go and see a patient of his, in his home. He apologised for the poverty of the patient. Two guineas was the absolute limit to the fee he was able to pay.

Jefferson said, "Right. I'll be along in about an hour," and wrote down the address of the patient. . . . He had not seen Cartwright for years, so he smiled at the way Cartwright, true to his old habit, apologised for everything. He apologised first for ringing up at that particular moment of the day, hoping that he had not disturbed Jefferson at anything else. He apologised for the place. . . . "Beastly place to get at, I know." He apologised for the smallness of the fee, and he apologised finally for the case itself. . . . "Nothing particularly interesting; it'll be rather wasting your time, I'm afraid; but I think it would cheer them up to see a specialist."

The patient's wife answered all Jefferson's questions, while Cartwright stood aside, looking out of the window. The patient himself, propped up on all the pillows that the little brick house could muster, listlessly nodded his assents to everything she said. He had had a "stroke."

She had told everything that was likely to throw any light on the case, and was trying to help now by repeating those features that had impressed herself most. "Yes," she said; "just a week ago Saturday. *I* thought it surely must have killed him. And I was as sure as *could* be that it was a nail—either in his boot or in the stairs. It wasn't as though he had slipped. He fairly *pitched* forward. . . . All the world as though it had been a nail catching. . . ."

A nail—catching. . . .

Jefferson hurried into the first telephone box he came to and rang up Miss Stark.

"Oh no—Doctor Jefferson, indeed I had not forgotten," said Miss Stark, full of indignation at his suggestion. "The note I made is here before me now; and I most certainly should have let you know the moment he came. But he apparently isn't coming for some time. I haven't had the revised copy of his play yet, and I'm to do all the correspondence 'per pro,' or else send it over to Mr Bluitt. I'm . . ."

"The devil you are!" Jefferson exclaimed. In a confused buzz that Miss Stark could not understand, he said "Good-bye. Thank you," and hung up the receiver.

At Waterloo he had a few minutes to spare before the train left for Pelchester. He spent the time ringing up his housekeeper.

He was not due at either of the hospitals till Monday, and it occurred to him that the patients who had managed to do without him for thousands of years would hardly miss him now for a day or two. He also drank a cup of tea in the station buffet.

The papers he bought for the journey he scarcely unfolded. He sat bunched up in his corner, frowning, whistling, and calling himself a fool, an imbecile, an idiot. *He*—a specialist in Neurology! . . . Any first year student would have spotted the thing at once. . . .

. . . . . .

§ 2

Mrs Petrie opened the door for him. She drew back, as if startled, said "Oh," and seemed to hesitate to let him in. "I—I don't know if you will be able to see him," she went on to say; then she turned, looking over her shoulder as if for help.

Jefferson could only smile at her and say, "I—I think I know all about it, Mrs Petrie. I expect it wouldn't do any harm for me to see him."

"But he said '*No one*'," said Mrs Petrie.

"Oh, *he* said that, did he?" Jefferson asked eagerly; "I'm

sure he'll see me though. He'll be very disgusted at first, but I shall take care not to do him any harm."

"He's in the front room," said Mrs Petrie. "I'll show you."

From the upper landing she pointed to the door and went softly downstairs again.

Jefferson quietly went in.

It was Mrs Petrie's old room—the sunniest and largest room in the house. All knick-knacks and odds and ends had been cleared away, and the room had been adapted to Petrie.

It was dark.

Upon the bed Jefferson could see only the white of pillows and the dark of a head upon them; the white of sheets and coverlet, and the dark of long bare arms stretched out over them.

The head turned, and the voice of Petrie said, "Hello, Jeff!"

"Hello, Hal!" said Jefferson.

Petrie's head tilted back to the old position that it had very slightly left as he spoke.

Jefferson, who seemed always to have read every word that had ever been written by poet, philosopher, or journalist; who had seen every First Night for as long as he could remember —Jefferson could find, beyond the absurd "Hello, Hal" he had already said, not a single word to say. . . .

He could only notice that a brass knob was missing from the bed-rail; and, as he became accustomed to the dim light, that an empty cotton-reel did duty for one caster.

Simply because he knew that he could not go on for ever staring about the room and saying nothing, he said "Better light up, don't you think, old fellow? . . . Can't see a damn thing. . . ."

"No need to light up," said Petrie quietly. "There's nothing to see, and you can jaw just as well in the dark. . . . Sit down and have a smoke."

"I'm going to light up," Jefferson replied, and did so.

Then he turned to look at Petrie.

Petrie looked back at him, blinked at the hissing light. He, too, weakly and very awkwardly smiled.

This was the very thing he had taken every precaution to

avoid—the showing of Rockleigh brought low, to people who had known Rockleigh arrogant in triumph.

He accepted his failure, now that it had come, without a word.

He was propped, half sitting, half lying, upon pillows. This position forced his shoulders as high, very nearly, as his ears. His hair was scattered and hung, clustering, over his forehead. For many days he had not shaved.

Jefferson pulled pipe and tobacco-pouch from his pocket, and then said facetiously, "What's the idea underlying the whisker, Hal? For you once told me proudly that you never do things by accident."

"Shaving's such a fag," said Petrie; then he added, "You see, time is so valuable to me now." He spoke easily, and without any effort. Yet it did not, somehow, sound quite right.

Jefferson had been watching him very closely. "Yes," he said, thoughtfully; "just let your lip go, Hal."

The left corner of his lower lip Petrie was lightly holding between his teeth.

"Now you know the *real* idea underlying the whisker," Petrie said, calmly, but still held the lip. "My dear fellow, why *can't* you let lying dogs sleep?"

Jefferson frowned. "I want to see how *far* it goes," he said.

Petrie opened his mouth. The corner of the lower lip immediately drooped down, and the whole lip just perceptibly sagged.

Jefferson studied it intently for a moment. Then he moved forward slightly towards the hand that had lain all the time quite still on the coverlet; Petrie immediately snatched it away.

"*That* looks good, old fellow!" Jefferson exclaimed; "*devilish* good. Look here!" He searched and found a pin in the lapel of his coat. He held it out, in the palm of his hand, to Petrie. "Pick this up," he said. "No; not with your nails, with the tips and the thumb." He steadily watched, not Petrie's fingers and thumb as they fumbled for the pin, but his biceps and the muscles of his forearm.

"Good," said he. "Now have a try with the other hand." Petrie obeyed.

"Oh yes, that's all right enough," said Petrie. "Now you see that I didn't require a Harley Street man with a rising practice to tell me that only my legs were paralysed. It's only my infernal legs, Jeff. Even the hips seem more or less good—at the moment—but . . ."

"Well," said Jefferson; and he pulled himself together. "Lucky thing you are not the greatest centre forward in the world! We should have had something to be miserable and inconsolable about *then*. But since you are only the greatest dramatist, all we need to do is smoke a pipe or two and make some plans. . . . When was it, Hal? Coming downstairs again? . . ."

"The day after you saw me," said Petrie. "And it wasn't on any stairs. Sorry; there was no 'suggestion' about it. It was in the tobacconist's in the High Street. I just crumpled up on the floor, and woke up here with the beginnings of this growth on my face. Nearly three days—then it all came back, clear as ever. Never for a moment felt the least bit paralysed, except for this confounded lip. I say, Jeff, is it very obvious, the lip?"

"No!" said Jefferson. "It's only just perceptible to *me*. I don't suppose I should have spotted it at all if you hadn't drawn attention to it by biting on it like that." He knew that even Mrs Simpson must have detected it; but the sudden appeal in Petrie's words startled him into the lie.

"I—I'm just going to have a look, Hal," he said. He pulled away the bedclothes and flung them over the rail of the bed. Petrie's legs—long and lean and hairy—stretched away, motionless, to the very end of the bed. The heels went beyond the bottom of the mattress, so that the feet wagged inert at any movement of the bed.

Jefferson fell to work—prodding and probing, pinching a muscle, flexing an ankle, pulling a toe. ". . . Lord, man!" he mumbled. "I could have brought my galvanometer and needles and things. . . . It *might* have been some use . . . though it never has been yet. . . . Some day perhaps. . . ."

Petrie had pushed his lip back into place under a tooth. With it thus fixed he smiled at Jefferson. "As a matter of professional etiquette," he said, "I hasten to inform you that

your arch nerve-cutter, Sutcliffe-Thwaiter—*Mister* Sutcliffe-Thwaiter, as he pointed out to young Conrad who very cheerfully addressed him as 'Doc.'—Sutcliffe-Thwaiter has done all that. Galvanometers, Half-Nelsons, Clove-hitches and reefs in every muscle. But there is nothing—to put the matter quite briefly—doing. . . . Dead as mutton, old fellow. Yet they look useful enough on the outside, don't they."

"Turn over," said Jefferson.

"There," said Petrie, "is where you have me on the hip. I can't. The weight of the pelvis, you know, and thighs, is so much greater than that of the thorax that it requires leverage from the lower limbs—or from a second party—to revolve it. . . ." He was looking up at Jefferson, grinning.

"I wish to God you'd stop chewing that lip of yours," Jefferson snapped. "It's beginning to get on my nerves. . . . Lord, I've seen worse things than that to worry about, so there's no need for—mum—mawkishness. . . ."

Quickly and deftly, by means of the flannel night-shirt, he turned Petrie over. The legs tumbled into the new position, the feet wagged and came to rest. He completed his examination and then stood still, frowning and biting his pipe, slowly shaking his head from side to side.

Petrie, his face in the pillow, said, "Good Alfred—I apologise for disturbing your meditations, but—as far, at least, as *I* am concerned—this side is quite done."

Jefferson turned him over. He was still frowning. If he could have been sure that Petrie was not again holding his lip between his teeth, he would have looked at him. Instead, since he could not be sure, he looked out of the window.

Petrie said, "You are forgetting, Jeff, that first and foremost you are a doctor of medicine. You must wash your hands. I have never yet heard of a doctor who did not insist on washing his hands, even if he has only looked at a photograph of the patient's grandfather. You will find cold water in that jug on the wash-stand. If you want it hot, you must ring the bell and then go down to the kitchen to fetch it. If you simply ring the bell and don't go down, the immediate result will be three people, each bearing arrowroot and biscuits."

Jefferson sat down again on the bed and relighted his pipe. "It's a *fall* that's done it, Hal. You must have had a fall, at some time or other; a bad fall, or a nasty knock. . . ."

"Observe a feature of the scientific mind," said Petrie drily. "If I could assure you that in such a place at such and such a date I fell down upon the floor, you would be perfectly happy. To the scientific mind, a clear statement of any problem is as good as the solution of it. . . . Let me assure you that both of falls and of nasty knocks I have had a plenty. But the explanation lies not there. Meditating here, counting my many blessings, I have seen it all. It has occurred to me that I have lived fifty-three years with about six inches too much leg, near and off. Two legs at six inches per leg equals one foot. That equals three hundred and sixty-five feet per year, equals one hundred and twenty-one yards and a bit over. Fifty-three times one-two-one and a bit—work it out for yourself and send the result to the *Strand Magazine*. The *Strand Magazine* would find that the amount of superfluous leg I have used during my life would reach from St Paul's to Shepherd's Bush or Highgate. . . ."

"Look here," said Jefferson, "that's all very funny, and —but—well, you can keep all that for the women if you want it. It would no doubt make them feel fine and throaty. . . ."

"I only mention it to point out to you that I am now, by being legless for a while, paying back a large overdraft. I did not think you would become maudlin. . . ."

"Who the hell *is* getting maudlin?" snapped Jefferson. He flung off his coat and went to the wash-stand and washed his hands. Likewise he washed his face and dabbed it dry.

"What about the girls, Hal?" he asked, as he sat down again.

"They're very well," said Petrie. "Cynthia's in Dublin this week, and Freda has begun emancipating for eight hours daily."

"Y—yes—but——" Jefferson began.

"No. She didn't," said Petrie, and his grin became, as nearly as possible, the old smile. "She is a most astonishing woman, you know, Jeff; most astonishing. She divined—absolutely *divined*, old fellow, that I would not want them to be told just now. Imagine that."

"Well—why——" Jefferson hesitated. It was all very well, he saw, to go on like that, saying nothings, begging the question just because it was so infernally hard to come to the point with Petrie. But certain things had to be said. . . . He tried again. "I suppose, Hal, that you've been thinking all sorts of muck and nonsense, lying here, nursing your scars and feeling damned sorry for yourself. One is apt to, you know."

"On the contrary," said Petrie, "I have been hard at work upon the tragedy. What do you think of calling it 'The Wolf-Hound's Lord'?"

"Rather too journalistic. I've been having a look at those Sagas again, trying to find something that would do. But hang the name!"

He had wondered if Petrie would talk about the play. He was delighted, almost reassured.

"I say, Hal!" he exclaimed. "It's going to be *immense!* . . . colossal . . . an eye-opener. And how the deuce did you manage to see all that for Madeline? Of course, it's as plain as daylight now. She was just *made* for such a part. Of course, some idiots will say that the part is only Nicolette cooked up again, some Juliet, and some what's her name—but she's much bigger than any one of them—or the whole lot of them put together, for that matter. . . . And as for Sir Freddie Winterton. . . ."

"Lord!" said Petrie, "won't it be fun to see his fat little legs sticking out under wolf-skins, and his little moon-face under eagle's wings. But he'll try to spoil the whole thing. I wish to heaven we could get him killed in the first act instead of the second. Even that will be difficult enough. Best of all, naturally, would be to have him destroyed shortly before the prologue. . . . How do you think young 'Dizzie' will do that wine-bibbing sot? I forget his name for the moment."

"Oh, Huthlaf," said Jefferson, who had not forgotten it. "I was sure you must have meant that for him. He'll be grand. But Hal, how on earth did you manage to get it all so simple? I swear there aren't a dozen three-syllable words in all of it."

"Oh Lord!" Petrie groaned. "Is it as obvious as that. . . ."

"It isn't obvious—just because *I* was able to spot it," said Jefferson proudly.

"No," said Petrie. "Perhaps not. But I hope you're not going to start talking about the 'music' of it, the 'cadence of the dialogue,' like the plump Sir Frederick. . . ."

"Well, you can say what you like," said Jefferson. "There *is* music in it, Hal—*and* cadence, in all your stuff, and there's no getting away from it."

Except for the beard, and the very slightly drooping lower lip, it might have been the old, robust Petrie smiling and talking, and warming up to his talk.

"It's fine that you've been working," said Jefferson. "There's nothing like work, old fellow, to keep your pecker up when—when it's easy for it to get down. . . ."

"Oh, I shall get *this* thing done right enough," said Petrie grimly. "Never you fear about that, Jeff. . . . It's almost done now. James has got to design the cave and the rocks in the second act. I shall insist on that at any cost. Somehow, too, I *must* manage a couple of rehearsals, since I'm apparently the only person in the world who can sit on Freddie at all adequately. . . . But Lord! Jeff, it's little enough, it's devilish little, when you think that in ten years' time I might have been able to build a real stage and a decent theatre and have done with Master Freddie and his absurd tricks. . . ."

"Well?" said Jefferson, "and what on earth is there to prevent you? You don't write plays and plan theatres with your legs, do you?"

Jefferson felt triumphant in the question. He had said the one thing that had, more than any other, to be said.

Petrie slowly raised his hand. With his pipe-stem he supported his lip and said, very quietly, "Don't let us try to talk like a pair of schoolgirls over this touch of luck, old fellow. You know as well as I do that it's all up. And you know why. . . . To try to blink now things that one has believed in all one's life would be nothing but the rotten funk that most of the people who are just barely alive are guilty of. It—things, I mean, in general—are not even a problem any more. You see, I'm not 'self-supporting'—to use our old catchword—not to the extent of moving myself for a single yard. Don't worry.

I'm not funking it, old man—the play has got to be finished, though. . . ."

"Don't be a fool," said Jefferson. "I never expected to hear you talking such—such infernal tripe." It was a lie; that was precisely the way he had expected him to talk. It was the very thing he had feared in the train, as it crept through the two hours of the journey from Waterloo carrying him and his folded, unread and unreadable newspapers. That was what he had feared—or else that Petrie would be able to talk not at all. . . . "Don't be a *fool*," he repeated, for want of anything better to say.

There was a creaking on the stairs, a fumbling with the door-handle. Mrs Petrie came in, carrying a huge tray, followed by Conrad with a folding-table.

"I thought you would just as soon have a little supper up here, Doctor Jefferson," said Mrs Petrie. "So that you and Charles need not stop talking—unless you think it would not be good for the patient."

"You're very kind," said Jefferson, "and I'm sure it won't do any harm. But he's no patient of mine, thank goodness—just an acquaintance."

"Listen to him," said Petrie, "and just immediately after washing his hands, too—the sign and official seal of medical responsibility."

"He's been having just whatever he fancies—though *that* isn't very much," said Mrs Petrie. "The—we haven't been dieting at all, you know."

She had been going to say "The doctor did not say . . ." Jefferson saw this, and smiled inwardly at the human love of detail and form, whatever the crisis. "This is just a cutlet and some jelly," she went on. "Conrad dear, two bottles of ale and glasses—I knew we had forgotten something."

"I should give him whatever he wants," Jefferson said; and it seemed to him that his words came far short of what he ought to have said to the brave, cheerful little woman and the gallant Conrad, who stood by smiling, hands in his pockets, careless as you please, putting up a fine show that nothing in the world had happened. "—Yes, give him whatever he wants. I expect you always have to in the long run!"

"Oh yes, indeed! He's a terror of a man!" said Mrs Petrie. Alert, and brightly smiling, she drew two serviettes from the pocket of her apron and placed them on the tray.

Jefferson, watching and listening, winced at the tragedy and at the comical, facetious way they were playing it.

Mrs Petrie smiled, but the lips that smiled were parched and colourless; her eyes shone with the light they had gathered from hours of staring into the silence of many nights; and the eyes, even while she smiled, glanced furtively at Petrie.

Petrie, too, smiled, and as he smiled he busied himself with a large handkerchief to conceal his lip that was already dead. In his heart was no laughter, but only anguish at seeing upon her the signs of anxiety and fatigue. His eyes shrank from the sight of her carrying food and drink and comforts for him, who had boasted—boasted—boasted. . . .

Jefferson saw all this, and he saw himself—cornered. They were in a trap, everyone of them, and he was damned if he could see any way out. . . . Not with Petrie the man he was.

He knew Charles Petrie as no one else knew him. He had seen him grow from weakness to strength. He had seen ideas growing with him from the size of a single sentence or chance phrase to the three-act plays that were a delight for the rollicking fun and good humour of them, and were a riddle without an answer for the subtle irony that lay behind the humour and the fun. . . . Jefferson knew Petrie, because he, too, had brains wherewith to think and eyes to see.

Seeing, he saw about a square inch of flesh dead upon Petrie's face. He could see again the long, thin limbs likewise dead—dead as the pickled, precious things that he had worked upon eighteen years ago—limbs of men so old, limbs so truly dead that even the largest blood-vessels in them had taken a lot of finding. And almost he could see the thoughts that ran live riot in Petrie's brain, thoughts that he himself—sane and cold and scientific—had always, like a fool, agreed with and encouraged. . . .

That was the fix they were in, and all he could do was to crack a fatuous joke with Mrs Petrie. And *such* a poor joke! . . . not even a joke; a mere bourgeois commonplace. . . .

Conrad returned with the beer and the two tumblers, and

upon Conrad, too, were the marks of tragedy. For all his nonchalance and fine negligence, his hair was brushed till it shone ; his collar was spotless. His eyelids were puffy, his cheeks pale. He had talked with his mother till his throat ached and was dry. He had smoked cigarettes in the darkness of his attic-bedroom till his tongue was a torture when it touched lemonade or bacon or salted fish like that they had for lunch that day. . . .

He placed the bottles on the floor, the tumblers on the tray. Then, as man to stalwart man, he spoke : " When are *we* going to have our pow-wow together, doctor ? " But he could not let it go at that. He, too, had to be jocular. He added, " About our present crisis," and jabbed a thumb in Petrie's direction.

" Oh, we'll have our pow-wow, old chap," said Jefferson, " as soon as I've given the crisis a thorough overhaul. I'm stopping a day or two. I've taken a room at the Station Hotel, but I'd like to spend as much of the time here as your mother and you will let me."

" Oh, but Conrad must go and get your bag from the hotel," said Mrs Petrie. " Who ever heard of such a thing ? You can have the girls' room. Indeed you *must*—unless you have found it uncomfortable at other times."

" Well, if you put it like *that* . . ." Jefferson began, noticing how polite they were being to each other—and about a thing of no more consequence than where one of them should sleep for a night or two. He explained that he had not, as a matter of fact, brought a bag ; that he had not actually taken a room. . . . And he saw them all in their trap running here and there and around it, haggard and frantic. . . .

" Well, we mustn't let the supper get cold," said Mrs Petrie. " Come along, boy. We'll have a talk with the doctor another time. I might as well take the hot-water bottle, Charles, instead of going empty-handed. It'll want filling again by now." She slipped her hand into the bed ; Petrie watched her, saying no word.

" Those covers will only be in your way, since you're ready to start." She took the two metal dish-covers from the tray. Laden with the covers and the stone bottle, she went quietly out.

When the door closed, Petrie turned to Jefferson and said, "The simplest plan of all is Conrad's—a car at least five or six yards long, in which he will drive me about till Kingdom come. He does not recognise any human need that cannot be met or adjusted by the addition or removal of a horse-power or so."

Jefferson helped the vegetables on to the two plates and unscrewed the two beer-stoppers. "You've been down about ten days, Hal; what—how exactly do things stand now?"

"Between Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde, you mean?" Petrie asked. "Nothing's happened at all. It just goes on; though I have a devil of a scramble at times to get my play shoved away under the pillow. I don't see much point in keeping it up much longer. We'll let it go till after Cynthia's tour. . . ."

"We'll do no such thing," snapped Jefferson. "I'm going to have done with that at *least—to-night*. We've no time for that kind of thing any more, Hal. It needn't interfere with Cynthia one bit. We won't let it; but you've got to try to get things into proportion, old fellow. . . . I propose to start by cleaning up the great mystery. There's no point in it. It can't help you at all; and the rest of the family is very much in need of something to cheer them a little."

Petrie smiled his smile of digression. "I thought I understood people well enough to be surprised or shocked at nothing. But *she* has astonished me beyond all words. She was wonderful about not letting Cynthia know till I was round. But why hasten disclosures, old fellow?" It was a new thing for Jefferson to hear a note of wistfulness in Petrie's voice. He wondered what on earth legs had to do with a thing like that. . . . "You see . . ." Petrie went on, "I mean, Jeff, you—you must think of Madeline. . . ."

"I've thought of Madeline," Jefferson answered quietly. "The conclusion I've come to is that you need not bother about that, old man. Maddie's full of good sense, and she's reliable for anything. She'll come and see you; and what could be more natural? This dramatist business will—will explain her like nothing else. . . ."

"I'm not going to explain her," Petrie cut in.

"That's precisely what I mean; she'll explain herself. These things have *got* to be talked about, Hal."

"Very well," said Petrie, "and let me tell you that she will *not* come and see me till—till—and she's not going to hear about this for—not for some time." Truculently he tucked the lip back under his teeth.

"Hal, old fellow," Jeff said, "it's no use your being sensitive about that. The odds are that it will stay like that till—even the rest has been put right."

Petrie smiled so that Jefferson snapped out, "You *might* get better, so what's the use of grinning? Haven't you ever heard of recoveries? Of course they're not common, and I'm not such an ass as to try to pretend to you that they are. I don't believe in buoying people up with false hopes, even if they're asses enough to be buoyed up. No, old fellow. You know as well as I do that the odds are some thousands to one against your getting better. At the same time you probably —again thousands to one—you won't get any worse. That we must face—*you* must face. You're man enough, and you ought to be philosopher enough to stick it out very comfortably; to devise means of not losing a great deal by it. You've always talked nineteen to the dozen about a *modus vivendi*. That's all we've got to get hold of, in a new situation."

"Yes," said Petrie; "talk's all very fine when you're not involved, knitted into a tangle of other personalities. Even new situations are impossible under those conditions. Changes are not a new situation then, but only a tear in the old one. Darning it up only makes a mess. No, Jeff, when you're all tied up like that, the only thing to do is to shut up and sit tight."

"I know one doesn't like talking of these things much," Jeff said. "But we're quite old fogies now, you and I, Hal, and we've always tried to do the best that is to be done in the general fix. It'll be a bit hard for everyone to keep everything they've got just now, but the great thing is not to get excited and lose focus. Most of what you've got can be saved without much hurt to anyone else. . . . Maddie won't get excited; she's got brains enough, has Maddie. She'll see everything exactly as it stands. She won't let herself down. . . ."

Petrie was saying nothing, and intending to say nothing. He only smiled. . . .

"Damn it, man!" said Jefferson, "stop grinning. The show has been run by *you* all this time—and just see the infernal mess you've made it look like. *I* am going to run it now, *my* way. You're my patient, helpless as an egg. I'm going downstairs to tell Mrs Petrie as much as I please, of anything I please. *She's* all right and the boy's a perfect brick. It's impossible to do anything with the obstruction of your ridiculous secret in the way. I am going to clean that up to start with."

"Well, remember just two points, while these big things are doing." Petrie's listlessness saved the words from the suspicion of being a sneer. "First of all, I've still got a fortnight's work ahead of me; and secondly, the girls are not to be disturbed and disorganised for another two months at least."

"On the contrary," said Jefferson. "You have about thirty years' work ahead of you, and secondly, no one in the world is going to be disorganised, except yourself."

"And you told me that your defeat as a practitioner lay in your lack of bedside manner! My dear fellow. . . ." Petrie drew pipe and tobacco-pouch from under his pillow and they both silently filled up.

Then Petrie fumbled under his pillow again, this time for matches. He could not find them; his box had been moved to the little table beside him. He stared at the box, carefully measuring the distance to it. He decided that he could not reach it; so he did not move.

Jefferson meanwhile lighted up. He tamped down the tobacco expanding in his pipe-bowl, first with his matchbox, then with his thumb. When he had produced a good, full cloud, he sighed and dropped his matches back into his pocket.

Petrie still did not move, beyond glancing once more at the matches on the table.

Jefferson smoked on a few moments in high satisfaction till he noticed that Petrie's pipe was cold and idle in his hands.

"Don't mean to tell me you've gone off your smokes?" he asked in surprise.

"Smo—er—no; rather not," Petrie stammered. "As a——"

"Why on earth didn't you shout?" said Jefferson. "You saw me shoving them back into my pocket." He handed his matches across.

"Oh, *matches*!" said Petrie. "Thanks. I—I've got some somewhere."

Jefferson saw the box on the table, and saw through his patient. . . . It was the little things that quietened him, the little and absurd things like not being able to reach his matchbox.

Petrie said, "Oh, *there* they are!"

Nodding at the box on the table, he furtively shoved Jefferson's under his pillow. Then he said, wearily, "Well, yes, I suppose you might as well tell them. It can't make much difference—now."

"Oh, *can't* it," said Jeff. "You just wait and see the difference it can make."

"Well, look here, Jeff." He spoke earnestly now, in a lowered tone. "Be a really good fellow, and—and take that tray and stuff downstairs for me. . . . You—you might tell them, too, that I'm not to have anything more after that cutlet. Tell—tell her I'm devilish tired and must go to sleep. . . . Oh hell, Jeff! I can't say anything to her to-night. You say you can understand things. I wonder if you can understand all this. . . . That confounded tray. . . . I did not think that she could even *move* a load that size. . . . She *is* an astonishing woman, Jeff. It—it needn't *hurt* her, telling her this thing, need it?"

"Hurt her!" said Jeff. "I should think it won't hurt her. I don't guarantee, though, that it won't do the other thing. Well, I can squeeze you out just another half-beaker of ale, and there's some more matches. So long, Hal."

When, with the great, crowded tray in his hands he was fumbling with the door-handle, Petrie called to him, "And —I say, Jeff. . . ."

"Hello?"

"Mind the step, as you go down, old boy—devilish tricky things you know—steps."

. . . . . .

§ 3

Outside the door Jefferson said, under his breath, "Oh Lord!"

Half-way down the stairs he said, ". . . Of all the filthy, rotten, and appalling luck. . . ." He saw the lifeless lip again in the scrubby beard, held pitifully in place under teeth, pushed furtively up with a pipe-stem, or hidden behind a handkerchief. He saw Petrie, shrinking again from the sight of his wife carrying the large tray, shrinking from asking another man to supply the amount of movement necessary to shove a box of matches across a space of three inches, and he wondered what on earth was to be done with a man who thought like that. . . .

. . . . . .

Sitting in the dining-room with Mrs Petrie and with Conrad (who sat between them but aloof), Jefferson felt as he had not felt for a great many years; not, in fact, since he wore an Eton collar and dined with elders. He felt a fool.

Yet nothing that had been said warranted the feeling. It was all quite straightforward.

"The point is," he began, "he's so extraordinarily sensitive, so *absurdly* sensitive about his helplessness, Mrs Petrie. . . . Being taken care of and waited on by his family. . . . He used to be strong, so infernally independent."

"He always was that," said Mrs Petrie; "always."

"With *professional* nurses and people about him," said Jefferson, "I think he would feel it less." Most amazingly, with a single sentence, he had come to the point. "The —the fact of the matter is, I've got a suggestion to make to you." He looked from her to Conrad—upper lip straight, head erect and still, hands sunk deep in pockets—and he added, "and old Conrad—you and Conrad. I—you see I am rather hot stuff—at least I used to be considered quite good—on nervous diseases. This is a nervous disease. My suggestion is that I should take him over. He would be nursed and looked after by people whose profession it is. . . ."

"If it is nursing and care that he requires," said Mrs Petrie quietly, "surely I am the one to give it to him."

"Quite," said Jefferson, "quite. I assure you I see your point of view most clearly, Mrs Petrie. I can quite understand how you must feel. But, you see, you are well and strong, and your feelings must be sacrificed to his." (The brilliance of this stroke delighted Jefferson.) "I'm afraid it's his peace and ease of mind that we must consider most. They are half the battle. He could stay at my place. I could keep an eye on him."

"You are very kind, Doctor Jefferson," Mrs Petrie said, with perfect composure. "Very good indeed. I'm sure we don't know how to thank you. . . . It is most touching. But—but I couldn't hear of such an arrangement." It was flat; definite. She meant what she said. Jefferson saw that they could fool and crack pointless and irrelevant jests in their perplexity; but serious prevarication was impossible. When they came down to the grim essentials, they could still be polite, but "yea" was "yea" and "nay" "nay."

"I only want you to think it over," he said. "Give the idea a little time, and think it very *carefully* over. There are others to be considered in this. Forgive me if I seem to force myself into your confidence, but I am a very old and intimate friend of your husband's. There's—Miss Cynthia and Freda and Conrad. Yourself, too, of course. You are all naturally very much on his mind. Of course he hasn't said it to me in so many words, but I know it. He is preyed upon by the idea of disorganising all your lives. . . . With me he would disorganise nothing. It's my *profession*, you see. I live by it. . . . Nurses. . . ."

"I know he thinks I am quite incapable of nursing him," said Mrs Petrie, "but I assure you I am not. He will see. I wouldn't hear of his going into a nursing home. . . ."

"But it's no *nursing home*," he argued. "It's my own place. He would simply be sharing my diggings—bachelor diggings—for the time being. . . . I've yards of spare space. You could always see him, all of you. The only object is to relieve him of the idea that—that he is making things difficult for others."

Mrs Petrie merely shook her head, very slowly. Conrad just growled, "Difficult!—rot. . . ."

"It *is* rot," Jefferson agreed. "But he thinks like that, and there you are. He must be humoured. You yourself will have your work to do—other work. As for me, well, it *is* my work. I'd enjoy it like anything. You see, old chap, we've always been first-rate pals, your pater and I. . . ."

This was absurd—the way he had strayed from the point and had actually arrived at pleading—pleading to Conrad.

He returned to the point. Turning to Mrs Petrie, he said "And another point which you haven't, naturally, considered, is his *work*."

"But indeed I have considered it," said she. "The moment I knew what had happened to him, I gave the new maid notice. I knew he would not be able to work; that we would have to draw in. Well, we can—quite easily."

"But, good heavens," exclaimed Jefferson. "That is exactly what you don't understand, either of you. 'Draw in,' indeed! There will be no need for anyone to draw in. He will be able to work. In fact, he *must* work. I will bet my hat that he is, at this very moment, working—at some of the finest work that has been done for ages and ages. He is the only man alive in the world to-day who is capable of doing that particular work, and it could kill him in no time to have to stop doing it. He must go on. Mrs Petrie—Conrad, old fellow . . ." He wanted to make the disclosure dramatic, he wanted to give a general fillip to things with it. "He is Harold Rockleigh—the greatest dramatist of the century, one of the very greatest artists the world has ever seen."

"Well!" said Mrs Petrie, drawing an enormous breath. "Well! . . . Harold Rockleigh . . . I have heard of him."

Conrad merely stated himself to be jiggered. Then, slowly, he said, "Just like him to get Rockleigh out of 'Petrie.' Anyone but a fathead could have spotted the game ages ago."

"Harold Rockleigh . . ." Mrs Petrie murmured again. "I must speak to—to George about it. He usually comes in at about this time of the evening for a few minutes. He would know. . . ."

"But *I* know," said Jefferson. "I can tell you all you want to

hear about Hal Rockleigh. To begin with, he has revolutionised the drama throughout the civilised world—and he is only at the very beginning of his career. He has *now*, stuffed under his pillow or his mattress or God knows where, the most wonderful thing that ever was conceived. He's great because he speaks to *everyone*, because he's so utterly simple, because he's as clean as a whistle and funny—funny as the deuce. He never told you what he was doing because—because, well, you see, he was not sure that it was any good—and—and whether telling you would do any good. There's never been anything like it before . . . and—and we've just got to keep him going. Never mind *us* and what *we* think. We are all little. He is *great*. A great dramatist, and the greatest fellow. . . ."

Jefferson stopped abruptly. An emotion had been let loose. The fact was startling.

Mrs Petrie dabbed a little handkerchief into her eyes. Conrad, wagging his great feet about, clenching his hot hands in his pockets and mumbling his new Adam's-apple up and down —Conrad too was weeping.

Jefferson said, quite foolishly, " There you are."

Mrs Petrie got up to go. Jefferson knew she was going to Petrie and he did not try to stop her. The last few moments had excited the three of them.

All he could feel was annoyance with Petrie's way of doing things. Petrie had asked him quite definitely not to let her go up to him. For that reason, therefore, if for no other, he let her go.

. . . . . .

§ 4

She went to her own room on the way, and then went in to Petrie, making a fine show of calm. But it lasted only as long as she said nothing. The words had to come, and with their coming went her calm. " Charles—you—you never told me. . . ."

The handkerchief in an instant was out again. " I—I know how you hate *this*," she said. " I'll go in a minute. . . . You—you haven't seen me doing it for years. . . . But I

must. I can't help it now. *You never told me.* You just allowed me to go on thinking—Oh Charles, I'm sorry. But it was so unfair. You—you . . ."

"My dear," said Petrie, "just come and sit down quietly and listen. It wasn't just to hurt you that I did it. I did it to—to—oh, I'm hanged if I know now why the dickens I did do it. I couldn't be sure of it, you see, Elizabeth. I had been sure of other things before. Cocksure. And sucked in too. I suppose, really, that I hadn't a great deal of faith in it—oh, but that's nonsense, because I always did have faith in it. No, I just didn't expect you to have any. I didn't really see why you should. . . ."

"But Charles," she said, "I *always* had faith in you. And you only tried to make it harder for me. You allowed me to think that you were doing nothing, and for all those years you were writing—*Plays*."

"Oh come," said Petrie. "Play the game, Elizabeth. I never even thought of writing a play till five years ago. And it wasn't to make it harder for you; it was just to make it easier for myself."

"But you allowed me to be weak and whining and helpless." Petrie winced.

"You could have stopped it, Charles. I was just ill and frightened—for the children. I *must* have been ill—now you will think I am just trying to make excuses. I'm not. Those things you said were all quite true." She put away her handkerchief and drew herself up. "But you will see that I am not weak and useless any more. . . . There now! that dear man has gone and taken down the water-jug with the other things. Never mind." She settled herself again, looking quietly at Petrie and smiling. "Charles, my dear," she went on, so low as to be almost in reverie. "You have nothing to worry about. You need not even miss your legs. I'll do everything for you—*everything*."

Then Petrie spoke. "Elizabeth," he said, and the lip slipped down. He jabbed it up again. "E—Elizabeth. . . . Please don't talk in that way. In fact, the best thing that we can do is not to talk at all. Lord, the way *I've* talked, and talked, and *talked*. Let us try to talk no more. All that *talking* ever does

is *hurt*. That is the one and only thing it can do. Everything else we can do quite well without it—by means of a smile, a nod, a caress. But *talking*—it hurts the talkee (which it is usually aimed at doing) or else it comes back—years afterwards perhaps—and hurts the talker. Hurts like the uttermost hell. I—I'm devilish sorry for the things I've said."

"Charles," said she, and lightly touched the lean, dry hand that lay upon the coverlet. "You must not talk like *that*—not now."

"You see," said Petrie, "you agree with me. Talk's no good; except for making funny plays, and I've done very well out of it in that way. It remains to be seen what kind of a tragedy we make."

"Tragedy!" exclaimed Mrs Petrie. "Listen, Charles. I thought, quite naturally—till Doctor Jefferson told me how things really are—that we were going to be poor again. And Charles, I was *glad*, positively glad to think that I should have the chance of showing you whether I am weak and helpless. 'Now,' I thought, 'he shall see what I can do.' . . ."

"Elizabeth, don't," said Petrie.

"But indeed I shall," she said gallantly. "Now that I am not to have *that* chance, since we are not going to be so poor again. . . . Well," she shrugged her shoulders, "I can still show you. Dr Jefferson suggested that you should go to him and be taken care of by nurses and servants. As though I should let you go *now*—now when at last you really need me. . . ."

"Elizabeth," said Petrie, "you mustn't. I don't need anybody. I never shall need anybody."

"Well, of course," she said, very deliberately, "not being *wanted* is quite another story. I shouldn't think . . ."

"Oh hell!" Petrie burst out savagely. "Just listen to us! *Talking* again. Can't you see that it's nothing of that kind? Can't you see what it really is? You *ought* to understand. . . . Oh well; I wish you would ask young Jefferson to look in again on his way to bed."

"Very well, dear," said Mrs Petrie. She was in perfect possession of herself now. "I'll ask him to come up. He can bring the water-jug and hot-water bottle. And Charles, if

it should be this other thing—I mean, if you really would rather not have me with you—don't hesitate to—to—you know, Charles. I am not weak, like you have always thought me. But if it isn't that—" and her little face became radiant, "if it isn't that—oh Charles, I shall be so happy to have this opportunity."

Chapter Three

§ 1

ON the inside of what was known in the Pelchester kitchen as 'the duster drawer' there was fastened with two drawing pins a postcard. It had been there to witness the coming and the going of many generations of shelf-papers for close on five years. Upon it, faintly now, were pencilled in Cynthia's handwriting the words, "Carpenter.—J. Wardrup, 11 Laundry Villas."

Mrs Petrie leaned down to make out the address, and said to Mrs Simpson, "There! I was sure I had seen it somewhere. . . . Is that the man?"

"Not to my knowledge," said Mrs Simpson. "Don't know 'im. There's been no call to have a carpenter in since Mr Steptoe died, two years ago now. Simpson may know this 'n."

"Ah yes," said Mrs Petrie; "but, you see, Simpson won't be in till evening, and Mr Petrie wants the carpenter as soon as possible. Master Conrad had better run over at lunch-time on his bicycle and see if this man can come. Miss Cynthia would not have written it down if she did not know all about him from some one."

Wardrup came before tea, remained closeted with Petrie in the bedroom for half an hour, pocketed his two-foot rule and Petrie's execrable drawing, and went home promising to have the job done by Friday night.

On Friday night, true to his word, he came. He brought with him four heavy wooden posts and joists and a brown paper parcel. Mrs Petrie and Conrad had gone out to see Sylvia for a few minutes, so it was Mrs Simpson who opened the door to the carpenter and directed him, with his burden, upstairs.

With nuts and bolts and heavy iron clamps he fixed a post to each leg of the bed. Petrie lay back upon his piled-up pillows, and watched him as he worked.

The tops of each pair of posts Wardrup connected by a joist. "Three be two, oak," he commented as he bolted and screwed these into position.

Thus he rapidly converted the iron bedstead into the semblance of a four-poster, with a horizontal bar above head and foot, and a block pulley hanging from the centre of each horizontal bar.

Petrie, the artist, leaned back and smiled; for the thing he had conceived and indicated with pencilled symbols upon a sheet of paper was growing visibly into actuality under the hands of a deft workman.

Wardrup tested his work by first pulling upon it, then pushing. "'d take three hundredweight," he remarked, satisfied. "There's the iron pegs and bits of choob I put in, to take the strain off of the three be two's."

Then he undid his parcel, producing from it about thirty feet of hemp tackle. Fastened by a swivelled "thimble" to the middle of the line was a wide strap, made of the two arm-slings taken from the window-posts of a hansom-cab that had been run into and destroyed by a tram-car in the High Street. Brass eyelets at one end of this strap and a large brass buckle at the other gave a sense of finish to the whole work.

Wardrup threaded an end of the line through each pulley, and tightened it up till the strap swung in the air above Petrie.

"How's that, sir, then?" he asked proudly.

"Capital!" said Petrie. "First-rate."

"I thought these here would be softer for the sling than a bit of hard leather." He touched the cab arm-slings. "A night-shirt's not much padding really, and a hard leather strap 'd gall, come to pull up in it every day four, five and maybe six times. Shall we just give her a try, sir? . . . See if there's anything wants doing while I'm here?"

"N—no, thanks," said Petrie. "It'll do splendidly. It's sure to do splendidly. . . . If you leave me your account, I'll have it seen to. . . . By the way, before you go, you might give me those two ends, will you?"

"They'll go nicely up here," said Wardrup, and hitched them over the iron rail at Petrie's shoulder.

The work was complete in every detail, and Petrie, the deviser of it, the artist, once more smiled.

Wardrup went out, and Petrie the proud and touchy, the broken and sensitive paralytic, looked upon the work and did not smile.

It was only an effort in his despair to substitute a little cunning for a little strength; to save him from having to ring a bell, summoning the strength of others to his aid; strength that he had once reviled and abused as futile weakness, and that now was bonded in slavery to him, who had reviled and abused—and boasted.

He took an end of the rope and slacked it till the hanging strap was lowered into his lap. He took it in his hands and closely examined the stitches, the buckle, and the swivel. They seemed strong enough.

Grimly, he buckled it round his waist, and slowly turned it till the swivel and line were to the front. Then he paused.

For hours on end during the last weeks he had sat still, weary of sitting, or had lain, foredone with lying, silent rather than that he should say one word to set the muscles of others in motion to lay him down or seat him up. . . . Every other detail they seemed to notice, every other need they forestalled. Mrs Petrie never went out of the room without first glancing at his table and saying, "Let's see. Yes, it's all there, I think. Tobacco—matches—water—paper—pencil—ash-tray. . . . Yes. . . ." Conrad never departed without his equivalent, "Got 'em all, pater? Baccy, lights, drink, bumph, pencil, muck-heap. Yes; you're fit for a bit. Shout if you want anything. . . ."

Petrie would smile and nod to this, and say no word of the agony in his back that was not a pain, but was wearier than pain. He could not speak: for had he spoken, one of them would have called the other, and together they would have struggled with the gaunt, helpless frame: and this, without his speaking, they had done four times in every day, raising or lowering him in the bed. . . . Then Conrad had one morning brought in a yard or so of canvas, ripped out of an old deck-chair, and boiled and scrubbed quite clean. This he had

slipped under him, and, with himself on one side and his mother on the other, the task had been made more easy.

Four times a day they had done this, and each time the iron had entered deeper into Petrie's soul, till at last he had thought of the blocks and tackle that were to free them of the task. . . .

He pushed down the bedclothes, and winding the slack of the rope that passed from his girdle through the lower block, he pulled upon it with all his might.

Nothing whatever happened.

Setting his teeth and gritting them together in the effort, he tried again : and again nothing happened.

Bitter in his defeat, and breathless from the trying, he mumbled, " Damn ! "

He slowly unbuckled the broad belt and worked it lower down.

As far down as he could get it, round his hips, he buckled it once more. Then, after a few moments' rest, he tugged again—tugged till the thin ropes cut into his bony hands, till little beads of sweat stood out upon his forehead.

But he had moved the dead half of him six inches in the bed.

He loosed his hold, opening and closing the fingers to remove the smarting creases from his hands. Then he drew the sleeve of his night-shirt across his brow and fiercely rested.

He heaved a great sigh. " Great God ! " he murmured, as he remembered that Mrs Petrie had helped to manhandle that bulk of useless clay punctually to the minute four times in every day ; and done it with smiles and the same little old jokes. . . .

The extent to which he had succeeded in sliding himself had nearly freed Conrad's strip of canvas from under him. He tugged this out and wound it round his hands. He again took hold of the rope and pulled, and again he moved.

Another six inches now would do it !

One more rest, and a third pull brought him low enough in the bed to lie straight out.

Breathless, sweating, but triumphant, he unwrapped his hands and thrust the hair back from his forehead.

Then very solemnly he placed a thumb to his nose and ex-

tended his fingers till the little one pointed at a fly upon the ceiling. " Put *that*," he said, " in your pipe and smoke it."

But the test was not yet completed.

He succeeded in pulling away the spare pillows that had become crumpled up behind his shoulders, and placing them on the floor beside him. Then he worked the belt round till he could get at the buckle. . . . That, at least, was one improvement that could be made: the swivel and the buckle would have to be put nearer together. . . .

He rubbed his hips where the belt had chafed him, and worked it up as high as it would go under his arms.

Turning it round, padding his hands again with the strip of canvas, he pulled upon the other end of the rope.

This time the protection of his hands was not necessary; nor, indeed, was the grim setting of his teeth. Being able to raise his shoulders helped, for he moved up quite easily. It remained only for him to grope for the pillows beside the bed, and to stuff them behind him.

Smiling and perspiring, he stretched out his hand.

When the bell-rope was already in his grasp he suddenly paused, remembering how much easier it was to pull himself up than down. So he quickly moved the belt down again, gloved his hands in the canvas, and pulled himself down. This time it was easier than the first. He had managed to get the belt lower, and removed the pillows before he began to pull.

He smoothed out the clothes, tidied his hair, moved the belt up under his arms, and, with tremendous gusto, rang the bell.

. . . . . .

Mrs Petrie came in with a steaming cup on a brass tray. Behind her came Conrad to collaborate in the final " tucking-up."

She noticed nothing till her feet were almost upon the pillows piled beside the bed.

Then, in a single, startled glance, she saw it all—posts, joists, rope and pulleys. Conrad meanwhile, eyebrows pulled up to the point of disappearing under his tousled hair, was coldly but devoutly stating himself, once again, to be jiggered.

Petrie's eyes twinkled upon them both.

"Oh Charles!" said Mrs Petrie; ". . . what? . . . how? . . ."

"How!" said Petrie. "How, indeed! Simply with a yo-heave-ho, me hearties. . . . Observe." He took hold of the rope; up went his shoulders, upwards slithered his body, till his head rested against the iron rails of the bed.

For the smile of delight and victory that wrinkled up his cheeks and the corners of his eyes, there was, in the other two, no response whatever.

Conrad dropped his head forward. "Well . . ." said he. "I say . . ." and then no more. He stood watching the heaving of Petrie's chest, and the red stripes on his hands where the rope had cut into them.

Mrs Petrie saw nothing at all. Her head was bowed, her lips trembled. "Charles . . . *Dear* . . ." was all she said; and after saying it, she quickly sat down.

A glance shot from Petrie to Conrad; a glance from Conrad to Petrie.

It was altogether too much for the boy in that room—looking an idiot; feeling a fool. "Good-night, Svengali, old sportsman," said he. "Good-night, mummy. I'll shut all hatches below." He went.

. . . . . .

§ 2

Petrie said, "*Well*—Elizabeth . . . I see that to you the romance of discovery and invention . . ." But the words were ridiculous, futile; that kind of thing simply would not do. Instead of finishing the jocular phrase he had thought of, he said, softly, "Cheer up, old lady."

Her answer was a jerk of little shoulders, a sigh and a choking sob. The pain of it was dire and unspeakable. Another sob, and she said, "Oh, Charles . . . Charles dear, how *could* you? . . . Whatever *made* you? . . ."

All Petrie could say to this was, "Come, come, my dear. . . ."

The pain he was witnessing was unlike most other pain that he had witnessed; for somehow he could not look upon this

as self-inflicted, fictitious—merely a wrong attitude of mind, to be attacked by argument, dismissed with a "Tcha!" or a "Tut!"

This pain that convulsed and jerked the little shoulders, that choked the timid voice, he himself had caused. Through lack of understanding he had caused it, through haste, through a needlessly clumsy and careless handling of a few stark facts.

"E—Elizabeth," he said. "It—it's just because you don't understand, you know. . . . Honestly, my dear, it—it isn't anything but that. . . ."

"Oh Charles," she said softly; "it is so cruel. It is as though you didn't believe . . . as though you could not be made to believe . . . not with all my trying to show that I —that we——"

"It is precisely because I *do* believe—" he said. "No, not believe—I *know*. Lord! I know just how much you would give, you and the boy. You—you would give *everything*. But, my dear, that doesn't make the taking any easier. Can't you see that, Elizabeth? It—it—*this*, I mean, is a *little* thing, a devilish little thing; I know that. But it—it sort of just pleases me to do it for myself. It—well, it just helps me to cheat myself into thinking that I am not living *completely* off you two. . . . God knows it isn't true; I too know it isn't true, for I have always seen the scheme on which humanity is run—the way something or other always draws the strong ones together to give what they can to keep the weak ones going—each one gives a little, or one gives *all*. . . ."

"My dear boy," said Mrs Petrie, very quietly, "you are talking rubbish."

"I'm *not* talking rubbish," said Petrie. "You are all doing it—and you yourself are doing it all the time. The boy; and Sylvia tries, and that astonishing fellow George, and those precious kids of hers—spoiling every walk of theirs to see how the old cripple is getting on, to fling him a morsel of their own precious life and liveliness to help to keep him going. And *you*, Elizabeth—*you*—every moment . . . day and night, incessantly. . . . Oh God! it's terrible. It's—it's driving —it's *killing* me. . . . *No*. It *isn't* killing me."

"Perfect rubbish," said Mrs Petrie again, quite serenely, undisturbed at the point where she had left off.

"You're doing it *now*," said Petrie. "I whine for a moment in my despair, and you offer me courage—the courage distilled by you out of your own vitality."

"Well?" asked Mrs Petrie; "and for how long, may I ask, did I use yours?"

"Nonsense!" said Petrie. "You know that everything I say is perfectly true. Look at young Jefferson, even, who ought to have more sense. When he can't come down to see me, he spends his time writing the most childish letters to keep me amused. As though *any* work of art could be worth all the twaddle he writes to me about that precious tragedy! The fellow's like a blessed photographer telling a child to look out for the birdie, in his patent efforts to rouse me up and keep me amused. . . ." He smiled and shook his head. "I dare say that kind of thing works very well with your suburban patients, but it won't work with me, young Jefferson—me, my boy, who was the first philanthropist to discover the crime and to expose it. . . . No. My dear Elizabeth, it only remains for Cynthia now to begin smashing herself up so as to give me some . . . Cynthia. . . ."

"And you imagine," said Mrs Petrie, calmly smiling, "that if they can succeed in getting you away from me, that things will be any better? That *I* will be any better off? . . . This contraption of yours only shows me . . ."

"Elizabeth," said Petrie; "let us be sensible, not sentimental."

"Yes," said Mrs Petrie; and showed obvious satisfaction. "Let us indeed be sensible. You will find me, as a matter of fact, quite sensible. It is some years now, Charles, since I really began to think things out. You will find that I am not such a fool as I look." Petrie smiled, and she smiled. "Very well. I owe my education, in the first place, to Harold Rockleigh, though I did not know it at the time. It started with that lecture you gave me about Cynthia's going away. For nearly two years I thought that you were a perfect brute and that my heart was broken; and then one day I found Freda reading a play called Hagar something-or-other, by

some one whose name I did not notice. I felt that perhaps she ought not to be reading things of that sort, so I read it at once; and there, if you please, was your lecture—large as life, and word for word. I only thought then, what a perfect humbug you were to dish up three or four whole pages of a play for my benefit (of course it never occurred to me to notice that the thing was not published till over a year after you had given me the lecture); I also thought what a fool I must be to be so upset by something that you had got out of a play. The play was a 'Comedy.' And so I began to see the truth of every word you had said to me. You see, Charles, at that point, instead of just *feeling* I began to think. It was all true. Everything you said about the parasite-system of life is perfectly true. I saw that I was the worst kind of parasite. . . ."

Petrie winced; "Elizabeth!"

She raised her hand; "Oh *please* don't think I've finished, my dear. The truth goes a good deal farther than that—and since you are a philosopher and a philanthropist, I am sure you can bear to hear it. The point is, not only that I *was* a parasite, Charles. I still *am* a parasite; and my particular victim now, as ever—is yourself. That is just, as you would say, a stark fact of nature. Since it is a regrettable fact, I am quite willing to join people in disregarding it—if disregarding it can do any good to *anyone*. . . ."

"What the devil," said Petrie, pensively, "are you getting at?"

"Simply this," she answered quietly. "In the first place, if you are taken away from me by any means, my whole means of subsistence would be utterly cut off from me. That is all very well—nothing for anyone to complain about. For years, as a matter of fact, this means of subsistence has been cut off from me; you have benefited tremendously, the whole world has reaped some benefit from it I daresay—and I do not honestly think it has done me a great deal of harm. But now the case is considerably altered. Since you have been obliged to rely on me for your tobacco-pouch and matches, for your breakfast and clean handkerchiefs, I have been coming into my own again—without your knowing anything about

it. I—I've been robbing you again; and the beauty of it to me is that you have not in the least suspected it. Just because I can walk and hop about and do the things that are done by hopping about, you have been under the delusion that you are *taking*, instead of giving all the time. But be reasonable, Charles—you can *think*, you know, when you want to. . . . What could you possibly be taking from me? As the boy would say—you can search me. I have nothing to give. When I come upstairs now I come with something that happens to be useful to some one (and the some one happens to be you), instead of walking about the house with nothing at all in my hands, or else with something that's quite useless. No, Charles. I *give* nothing, simply because I have nothing to give—no more than have those ropes and wheels and things that you have had invented for you. . . ."

"Those ropes and wheels and things," he corrected her, "are entirely my own invention."

Mrs Petrie did not pause to notice that she had slighted the pride of creatorship. She went on with her statement. "Nothing is so true as that pet saying of yours that all the people living to-day manage to live because some—the vast majority—manage to derive vitality from others, sponging off them—off each other and off the tiny minority of mankind made up of the grand, free, big people who dig their living out of themselves—dreaming, smiling, seeing, creating things. . . . I, Charles, am one of the great majority and must always remain so; one of the parasites. I was forced for years to study music, but it was always terrible drudgery to me, because in myself I had not a single note. . . ."

She lowered her voice and leaned slightly towards him, confiding. . . . "I've got no dreams. I can only wait, hang about on the fringe of those that have them—'touting' as you would say—in the hope of catching a glimpse of them. And the only dreams I can hope to catch any glimpse of are—are *your* dreams, Charles dear."

The thought brought Petrie to the point at which, three months before, he would have shot off upon a walking tour round the room in which he found himself, clucking and jerking his hands about in his pockets. Now he moved by filling out

his chest with air, by wagging the pipe about between his teeth, by unclasping his hands and laying them down beside him.

So tenderly that the action was scarcely noticeable, she patted one of them, and said "My poor old Charles! You feel the loss of your legs—almost ridiculously. Suppose you had always had wings, and had suddenly lost the use of them. Though you still had hands and legs left, you would feel just as indignant about it; but, since you have never had wings, you are not in the least upset by not having them now. . . ."

She was coming near to one of those old flashes now, one of those happy flukes of expression that had delighted the gaunt boy of thirty years ago. She was talking as she had seldom talked since then. Once more, she was well abreast of the situation in which she found herself—not weary and frightened, a little bit behind it, nor breathless and apprehensive, a little bit in front of it. . . . The boy of thirty years ago flung back his head that he might hide his face before the courage of her; in so doing, he pointed towards the ceiling a shaggy, grizzled beard.

Again, with infinite tenderness, she touched his hand. "You are morbid, my poor boy," she said (thus she had spoken to him of early failures—till failures had become the order of the day, the habit of their lives); "morbid—poor boy—and sore about this thing that has happened to you."

She got up and moved to the foot of the bed, where it was not so easy for him to evade her eyes. She leaned upon the rails, as he had leaned to fasten her with his gaze, to flood her with the bitterness of his reproaches. Between this same rail, with its one brass knob still missing, and the wooden joist of his contriving, she said lightly, "Of course, you *can't* walk and frisk about any more—there's no denying *that*. But—legs or no legs—you are still of the minority, still of the great, free, *big* people; still a maker and a giver. And I am still a parasite. There."

The "there" was intended for emphatic punctuation. To mark it still further she moved away from the bed and sat down upon the chair beside it. "You can make what you like of all that, Charles. Parasites have no right to stand

in the path of the others, hindering and hampering them, begging them for glimpses of the dreams that are their life. . . . If you miss what I take from you, I am quite prepared to go, like they all say I must. . . ."

"Who says you must ?" said Petrie.

"Oh," said she, "it's nothing to get annoyed about—*everyone*. Naturally enough, they think I must get on your nerves and worry you. Quite possibly I do; but that is for you to say, not them. And before it was possible for you to tell the truth about *that*, it was necessary for you to know the truth I have just told you—the truth that in pulling you up or down in bed with the boy, and in doing the few little odd things that I do do for you, I am giving nothing at all, but taking. . . ."

"Elizabeth!" said Petrie, turning his face to her, wide-eyed in astonishment. "Elizabeth. . . . Either—either you have become a—a most astonishingly efficient liar . . . or—or—or——" He shut his eyes together again; not for the purpose of shutting out any vision, but simply for the purpose of squeezing the lids very tightly together. He left the alternative unsaid.

"My dear Charles, let us endeavour not to become sentimental over this affair," said Mrs Petrie, and drew the chair a trifle nearer to the bed. "This is just a sensible little talk we are having—two philosophers—man to man. Before, when you just went away and lived unto yourself the way you did, it was different—vastly different. It was right for you to do so, and I only got the punishment that all parasites deserve. I had nothing to give in exchange for what I wanted to take from you—nothing that was any use to you. I do not know for certain that I have now; but I *think* I have, or you would not have gone worrying your head over this clothes-line affair. . . . Anyhow—it is just that that makes all the difference now. If I have a little something that I can give you, and if you let me give it—well, I get everything in return—everything. I have lived more in the last few weeks than I ever lived before. And it is just because I have seemed to be able to come very near to you. . . . You must indeed be a wonderful fellow, Charles, to make me feel like that after all

these years. You see, I am not troubling to lie to you. You are not such a fool that I could say to you, 'I have always loved you.' I haven't; I had simply forgotten all about that, or at least we got separated by Life. You had to go your way, dreaming your dreams, and I had to go mine—cooking and grumbling and waiting; waiting for you to wake up from your dreams or for something to turn up. Well—it *has* turned up now—for me. I—I see a chance of such happiness now, of —of . . ."

"Oh, Betty," said Petrie; "*Betty*—it's, oh, it's just hell to listen to you. . . ."

Betty's eyes twinkled upon him and were wet. She said, "Positively, Charles—it must sound perfectly ridiculous to you, and would to anyone else—but positively—you are all the world to me now. . . . When you were nothing to me, there was nothing else either. There is nothing I can do in the world—nothing at all except the little things I am able to do now for you. You see, I'm not like Cynthia. . . . Where you go, there must I go also."

"But, my dear," said Petrie, quietly; "One cannot talk like that. One cannot just take the life of another. . . . You see, I'm *done*."

"Done, indeed!" she exclaimed. "You have done *walking* and *dancing*. But Charles Petrie is still left, and Harold Rockleigh. Just listen to me. You must see that I have quite enough sense to understand most of your ideas, and you know that I agree with them. I know it would not be right for Cynthia, for instance, to give up her life to taking care of another person. But I, you see, have no life of my own. In—in very little ways—if—if it were not a hardship or an inconvenience to you—my continuing to do these little things would just give me opportunities of getting a little life. I should like to be allowed to think that I was making up for it to you in—in these little ways."

Petrie was intent, listening to every word she said, weighing it, testing the value of it from its sound and from the look with which she said it. She had not faltered for words, nor yet had she been too easy in their delivery. Petrie peered closely at her, intent only upon the answer to the riddle.

"If," said he at length, "if you are not trying to cheat me, Elizabeth. If, in short—Lord, you are an astonishing woman! . . . But women *are* such infernal liars."

"Charles!"

"*Yes*. Perfectly appalling liars."

"If you had not been so absorbed in your own condition," she said with a shrug, "you might have noticed for yourself how happy I have been."

He looked at her again—the truth-seeker, the philosopher—wondering. . . .

"Yes, dear boy," she went on quietly, unflinching beneath his scrutiny. "You have been so utterly miserable; as though you had been robbed of everything. But think, Charles; have you been robbed of—everything? Before—years and years ago now—before we had any real worries, we—you—were very happy. It was just the difference in our two ways of treating worry, when worries came, that made us unhappy. But before the worries came so thick upon us. . . . What I really mean to say is, that we have no worries now. Also, Charles, when we were happiest—when *you* were happiest—you were also laziest. You did not spend much time walking or running or dancing and skipping. You just lounged about, pretty much as you are obliged to do now. Our happiness did not depend on being able to walk then, and I don't see why it should *now*. . . . But there, I cannot pretend to be a philosopher. I can't argue. . . ."

Petrie did not answer; so she stood up, once again marking an emphasis in punctuation. "That, I think, is enough food for thought for one night. I just wanted to give you a side-light in which to think things over."

Petrie was nodding his head, as he moved the sling slowly down his ribs. "Elizabeth," he said, pausing suddenly in the task, "do you mean honestly to tell me that you actually prefer—Oh Lord! the only possible way of saying this is like a servant girl in the Sunday serial—but, I mean, suppose I were to die, Elizabeth?"

"Well," she said, as calmly as a gardener estimating the chances of rain, or a farmer judging the possibility of damage to crops or stock other than his own. "Well, in that case,

I should not be the least surprised to find that I died, too—sooner or a little later. Probably it would be sooner—just to prove your great theory."

When Petrie had wound the rope around his hands, she stepped forward, hands outstretched to help, then stood suddenly still.

He strained the tackle, then let it slack again.

They realised, both of them, that their handling of those ropes would be something vital: an answer; an admission. . . . So they paused. Then Petrie said, quite lightly, "If you will take hold of my knees, Betty, and heave-ho when I do, you will see how wonderful this opus of mine really is."

She did so, and in a single easy movement he was down.

She whisked away the spare pillows, smoothed the one she left, picked up the little tray and empty cup, and glanced over the table.

"Everything?" said she. "Tobacco? matches? water? . . ."

"Yes, everything," said he, "—thank you."

"Good-night, then, Charles."

"Good-night—Betty. . . ."

But as she slowly turned to go, he seized her little, blue-veined hand. "I say, Elizabeth," said he, "if—if you have been trying to pull my leg, to—to—well," and he loosed her hand again, "it simply isn't much good trying to pull my leg and bluff me."

"I discovered that," she said, "very nearly thirty years ago. I am quite sure you will be able to make up your mind for yourself whether I have been trying to pull your leg."

She lighted the candle and turned down the gas. Passing his bed again, she brushed a curl from his forehead and patted it into place.

"Sleep well," said she; and from the door, "do you propose even *sleeping* in that contraption?"

"'d Lord, no," said Petrie; "I'd forgotten the thing."

"Good-night, Carlo."

"Good-night, Betty."

Chapter Four

§ 1

THE next morning, when Mrs Petrie tiptoed to the bedroom door and softly opened it, Petrie was already propped up. In his hands were the large light board of "three-ply" and the stylographic pen that Conrad had brought to him the morning after the disclosure of the "Secret."

"I shall get this off to Miss Stark to-day," said Petrie, knocking the pen upon the papers that were clipped to the board. He meant so many things by this piece of information that its chief significance was for himself and not for her; for she could not guess at the vastness of the new problem that awaited his mind and will as soon as he could rid them of the perplexities held within the two hundred crumpled pages before him.

He worked that morning upon those pages—upon their wide margins and between their typed lines, upon their backs and upon clean new sheets from the table beside him—as he had not worked in all the weeks since he had found himself suddenly anchored to his bed.

When, at three o'clock, Conrad strolled into the room for the packet, Petrie was fumbling for the buckle of his sling.

"Why the deuce didn't you have that fixture put in front?" asked Conrad.

"Even *I*," said Petrie, "wondered that—afterwards. So I can concede nothing to you on that point."

"Easy enough to shift it, then," said Conrad.

Sitting down on the edge of the bed, he produced from his pocket a small pair of pliers in a neat leather case. Petrie stared as though the pliers were a rabbit or a bouquet being thus casually produced.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said he. "What on earth . . ."

"Handiest things in the world," Conrad explained, "these

—and a bit of wire." From his waistcoat pocket there appeared a ring of neatly wound wire.

Petrie watched him as he moved the swivel and the tackle from the centre of the belt to the buckle with a dozen deft jerks and twists. "Conrad," he said solemnly. "Tell me, old fellow. How often in the course of, say a week, do you have recourse to those tools you wear? On a rough average."

"On a rough average," said Conrad, "I should say a couple of times a day."

"Then," said Petrie, "there is no doubt about it. You are a genius. Nothing more nor less than a genius. If the common round, the trivial task will furnish all you need to ask in the way of pretexts for using a pair of pinchers . . ."

"I wish you wouldn't go calling pliers pinchers," said Conrad. "Pinchers! Sylvia calls them pinchers—'pinchers with those scissory things on them.' . . ."

"Just give a yank to my knees, old chap," said Petrie, "and we will set the machine in motion for your inspection."

When he was lying down, he said, "Since we are, for the moment, talking shop, I wish you would tell me what you think of my invention."

"Not altogether so dusty," said Conrad, looking critically over the thing, and doing it, for the first time, quite openly. "However, if you had put in a couple of decent metal blocks in addition to those squeaky old wooden pulleys, you would have required just one-quarter of the elbow-grease to work it—allowing, of course, for friction."

Petrie whistled. "How on earth do you make remarks of that description?"

"How?" said Conrad. "It's inversely as the ratio of the square . . ." Petrie muffled his ears with the pillow. "Hold!" said he. "Cease and desist, my son. If you develop much farther along those lines, you will soon be forced to purchase hats with a basement."

Conrad was getting a little old for jests of that broad type. He smiled, however, and grunted, and said, "Chalk that up, old sportsman. Make a note of it for the next dish of drama you present to the world. Meanwhile, I would just like to remark that if we had that old car, I could lug you out now and

again for a blow of fresh air instead of lying here, moping and fugging. . . ."

"No time for that kind of thing *now*, old fellow," said Petrie. He became suddenly serious. "It's time you got to work—properly to work, upon your inversed ratios and things."

"Time enough for that," said Conrad. "When we have moved our tents into a less God-forsaken spot than this. Mother says that won't be so very long now."

"Oh," said Petrie, "does she!"

"Yes," said Conrad, "and I say, pater, what would be the point of my going into diggings with the girls? It would bore me to death—and them too, before very long. I should think *the* plan is for the three of us to go on as we are—seeing that we make such a cheery group. And that is why I say, the sooner that comic doctor pal of yours and I go and get that car, aforesaid, the better. I could blow round in it a bit here, before tackling the traffic in London."

"Conrad, old man," said Petrie, "where did you get the idea that you are about to become a sick man's chauffeur for the rest of your life? . . . I need no car, old fellow; and you—you have your work to do."

"Oh *don't* you just want a car!" snorted Conrad. "If you think you are going to settle down into throwing up the sponge and doing a 'pitytheporebline' act, you're making a beautiful and lovely mistake. And if you think that I am going to settle down into digging with a brace of young spinsters, you are making the same type of mistake twice. I'd like to see *you* in the exclusive society of two women. It's rot, dad. We'd be as snug as anything together as we are, whisking about in that car. It will be the easiest thing in the world to get a body fitted to her that will take a wheeled chair. . . ."

"Oh, get out!" said Petrie, "you and your wheeled chairs and fair sexed vehicles. Get out, or you'll miss that confounded post."

. . . . . .

§ 2

Having neatly and conclusively despatched one set of problems, Petrie felt inclined for nothing so much as another problem at which to set his mind—alert and lively, as Conrad had left it, departing with the manuscript for Miss Stark.

The talk itself with Conrad, such as it was, had been a summary of the whole problem. Conrad had threatened him only with the thing he had to expect from all of them; the thing that he had to guard against, to fight and defeat. The fight—he had no misgivings on that score—would be a terrible, hard one; a fight of one man against all humanity; against the impulse of all society to keep weak things alive at the expense of the strong ones.

So the first vital question, he saw, was whether he was, in fact, a weak thing. Answering this emphatically in the negative, he saw at once that it was not at all a vital question. Whether he was weak as a kitten or strong as a giant did not matter a straw. The point—the important point—was that they all thought him weak, and wanting something of them. They thought he stood in dire need of them, and so—will he, nill he—they would strive to give of themselves to him. Like Conrad, they urged him, one and all, to let him waste their time in brooding over his calamity and over the shallow, absurd pretence that no such calamity existed. They wanted, from the old, damnable impulse of all society, to spend their time in staring at his weakness and trying to cheer him up; to waste their tissue in moving the hulk of him from one place to another, or in shifting things—the absurd things that form the furniture of everyday life—to within his reach.

All this he had known for many weeks; and had dully, vaguely, but with terrible bitterness, thought over it. But he had not, before, come to actual grips with its details. The manuscript—disarranged, crumpled, and only three parts done—had stood between him and them. He had only known the main facts, and knowing them he had groaned and cursed—and thought out the two pulleys and length of rope that now swung above him. . . .

It was their pity of his weakness that he found the hardest to bear without full-sounding curses; their furtive signals, their wistful movements to forestall his wants. . . .

Then suddenly Mrs Petrie—Betty—an astonishing, pert little creature of a Betty whom he had well-nigh forgotten—had assured him as calmly as you please, that this idea of his about *her* thinking him weak and needful was utter nonsense, a rotten fiction of his own rotten egotism and sensitiveness. . . . Dimly and blurred by years he saw a long-lost picture. It was of scurrying, fleecy clouds seen through the branches of great trees in the Bois. Beside two people in the shade of these same trees there fluttered the paper from around the good sandwiches they had eaten. He heard the echo of her words. . . . "Oh Charles. . . . You are so wonderful. . . ." Ordinary enough words; trite words. But they had made him feel a tremendous fellow, and that was no trite, ordinary thing; for he had lived upon that same feeling of tremendousness for nearly thirty years. . . .

Beside this he had another picture, not blurred and dim; he could hear words that were no dying echo of the dead past. The golden head was fading fast to silver, the little shoulders—bravely held up—were inclined to droop, but the words remained the same. ". . . Charles, . . . a wonderful fellow. . . ."

Petrie, broken for many weeks and humbled, was caused to start by them, stirred to rise up again; to feel, once more, the old tremendous fellow.

But rise up he could not; and the reason he could not was that women are such appalling, such accomplished liars.

If he could be sure that Betty was not lying, not trying to wheedle, to coax, to cheat him. . . .

So at length it was that that became the vital question—indeed, the only question: did Betty truly believe that he was not, now that his knees were loosened beneath him, a poor thing?

To answer this question he could only watch, and very carefully listen.

Listening, he could hear brisk footsteps that bustled about the room below him, and from the room across the hall into

the kitchen ; he could hear the tinkle of crockery, and sometimes he heard a snatch of song hummed, as snatches of song are hummed out of a stout, happy heart, cheerily and with many silent intervals.

Watching, he saw the well-knit, neat little figure braced to its little tasks. He could look up into eyes that sparkled now with life and purpose ; at the deft, busy little hands and the crisp, workmanlike cuffs at the wrists. He could look into a face that had once been grey and mask-like, but that now seemed alert and was flushed from the exertions of living. . . .

It seemed alert ; and that was the torment of it. For, well as he might see the face and the sparkle of the eyes, beyond them, into the deeps of the brave or dissembling little heart, he could not see.

. . . . . .

§ 3

He had been watching her thus for four or five days and listening to her, when she said to him one morning, " Have you nothing on hand that you could be working at, Charles ? You must find the time hang very heavy. . . . Possibly the boy is right after all ; perhaps, if you could get out . . ."

" We must leave the boy alone, Elizabeth," he said.

" Some people," she suggested, " don't thank you for leaving them alone. For instance, it's beautifully sunny in this window ; and I'd sooner sit and do my darning here than . . ."

" Then please do," said Petrie. He wished he could have said it differently. But what else was there to say ? He could not explain that it mattered not a fig to him whether she sat there or in Jericho to do her darning, while he had his thoughts to think. Besides, that would not have been strictly true ; for if she sat in the window, he could watch her, talk to her, try to catch her out. . . . He could not change his answer, but he knew what he could do instead.

" Suppose we drink a cup of tea, Elizabeth ? " he said.

" Of *course* we shall," said she, rejoicing—or seeming to rejoice—to do his bidding.

In five minutes she had brought the tea, and together they drank it.

All her casual remarks he answered with mechanical cheerfulness; which does not mean that he was cheerless within himself, heavy-hearted. He was neither heavy-hearted nor light. He was merely nothing. The idle deadness of his legs seemed to have spread to his very soul. Only his eyes, his ears, and his tongue seemed to be left alive, to note the things that occurred before him, to make civil answers.

He saw her tidying up the tray, and settling herself in the chair before the window. He heard her saying, "Now mind, Charles, you must turn me out the moment I begin to fidget you by being here."

"Why on earth should your being there fidget me, Elizabeth?" said he; "I'm not trying to work. . . ."

"Why don't you work, my dear? No inspirations?"

He made an effort and said, "Oh yes, plenty of inspirations. I shall work soon enough. I haven't quite got rid of that last thing yet, you know."

"Finished that book?" she asked. "Shall Conrad get you some more?"

"No, thanks," said he. "Don't bother about me, Betty. I am perfectly happy."

The fact of the matter, as he discovered, was that he did want a book to read, and wanted it badly. But he could not tell them which book it was. He did not himself know, exactly. He knew only that he could have found one for himself, by glancing along the shelves in the study over the furniture shop, and taking out five or six volumes, one of which would eventually meet his requirements. But how could one ask another person to fetch half a dozen books? . . . Or which precise half-dozen? . . . It was a thing which no one else could possibly do for him, so he lay still, idle.

"Is your tobacco all gone, Charles?" she asked after a while. "Or are you not wanting to smoke so much the last day or two?"

"Oh. . . . Plenty of baccy, thanks," said he; but the fact of the matter was that the three pipes on the table beside him had all arrived at the stage where, normally, he would have

stepped into the clean little shop in Duke Street (or, if he had been at the moment in Pelchester, into the High Street shop where he had had his seizure) and chosen a new pipe for himself.

Once again he was powerless, and others were incapable of helping him. Conrad could not be expected to get him a pipe of the right sort. Nor could Elizabeth; her sex was wrong. Jefferson was the only person he could think of as knowing anything about pipes; and Jefferson had not been near him for almost a fortnight. Something must be wrong with Jefferson. For nearly a week he had not even written. . . .

There came just then a ring at the front door bell; and rings at the front door were not so common an occurrence that Mrs Petrie could sit quite unmoving in her chair listening to them. She poised her needle in the air and turned her head. There followed Mrs Simpson's voice in conversation with another in the hall. Mrs Petrie put down her work and stood up. Steps across the hall, the opening and shutting of the sitting-room door—and Mrs Petrie went out to the landing.

Mrs Simpson met her on the fourth stair, and silently handed her a letter. "He *would* wait," said she. "So I've put him in the sitting-room, 'm."

She turned, and went grimly down again—washing her hands, obviously, of a thing for which she would take no responsibility.

Mrs Petrie recognised the writing as Jefferson's, for he had insisted, during his first visit, on giving her a prescription for a tonic. (Since, however, she was done with medicines for good and all, she had destroyed the prescription.)

Petrie opened the letter and read:—

"Well, old Hal, what do you think of him? Isn't he superb? His name is Welmon. You may remember (or probably, being self-educated, you never knew) that he is just precisely what poor Aristotle designed (quite *a priori*, since he did not, obviously, think any such thing humanly possible) as the Ideal Slave.

"He seems quite a cheery thing, too; and his hideousness, you are bound to agree, is a thing sublime, a joy for ever.

"Quite seriously, though, having run accidentally across

the fellow, and finding that his credentials were excellent, it occurred to me that you might be able to make some use of him; so I've sent him down for inspection.

"I have, by the way, been having a few things done to your place in Adelphi, in case you should feel like running up for any length of time anent the tragedy. Sir Freddie is, I'm told, beginning to get a trifle restive for a look at it.

"Ran up to Edinburgh on Tuesday, as I had some business. Looked in at Cynthia's show in the evening. She's looking very fit, and had a great reception. I was, of course (*vide* contract) incog.

"I shall run down to-morrow afternoon and stay the night. Let me know, per Welmon, if there is anything urgent that I can do for you. Meanwhile, smoke a pipe or two over the idea of moving up here. JEFF."

The letter, in being handed across to Mrs Petrie, folded itself up automatically along its creases. Unquestioning, and making no comment, she laid it down upon the table.

It was a little enough thing, but it hurt Petrie.

"It's—I—I meant you to read it," he said.

While she read, he looked at her and mused aloud. "So there is a plot . . . a definite plot. . . ."

Disregarding him, she folded up the letter and said very slowly, "It isn't going to be necessary to surround ourselves with a lot of servants and people, is it, Charles?" But she did not wait for his answer. "I'd better send this man up, hadn't I?"

"Might as well," said Petrie.

Petrie could hear no word between the opening of the sitting-room door and its shutting. None, in point of fact, was spoken.

His door presently opened, and in walked Welmon—a giant negro. Even for a negro he was tall and broad; black with the lustreless black of powdered charcoal, his flat face cleft across with goodwill and cheer.

Petrie's impulse was to whistle at the wonder of the creature before him, to gape in amazement at the genius of Jefferson in thinking of such a thing.

"Won't you sit down, Welmon?" he said.

"Thanks very much, sir," said Welmon, and sat—first, with great punctilio, pulling up the legs of his beautifully creased trousers. Then he unbuttoned the top button of his coat, allowing his chest to expand to the full.

His suit was an ordinary, unobtrusive masterpiece of tailoring in navy blue serge. His socks were grey, his shoes black. Pictures of the soft collar he wore adorned every carriage in the Tube over the legend, "Comfort with Distinction."

Welmon placed his bowler hat upon his uppermost knee, and his yellow gloves upon his hat.

He sat gloriously calm and unperturbed, with his black, tremendous hands folded upon the knob of his cane while Petrie looked him up and down. He was accustomed to being looked at.

"I—I feel obliged to remark that you dress extremely well," Petrie said at length.

"It's very good of you to say so, sir," said Welmon. "But I'm afraid no personal credit is due to me on that count. A natural taste in sartorial matters is as innate in every negro as the blackness and thickness of his hide. I also learnt a great deal in that respect from the Earl. That appears to be a thing that your aristocracy shares with us. . . ."

"H'm," said Petrie. "I would say also that you are a student of human nature."

"Well, yes, sir," he admitted; "I suppose I am. The fact of the matter is, that at the moment I am doing a course in sociology at night school."

"Then, what the deuce . . ." Petrie began; but he stopped suddenly, for Welmon had at last smiled. That is to say, he divided his face at a single stroke, like Gaul, into three parts—an upper, a middle (bounded at the top by the wrinkle into which his eyes had vanished, and his mouth), and a lower.

To himself Petrie said, "Well, I'm damned." To Welmon he said: "You must pardon my surprise. I was led to believe, by the letter you brought me, that you were some sort of manservant."

"I am," said he. "A valet, to be exact; and, if I may say so, a very excellent valet." He produced a leather case from his breast pocket. He handed Petrie two letters from it;

to one of which was pinned a small advertisement cut out of a newspaper. "Perhaps you would care to look at these, in the event of your considering my application at all favourably. . . ."

Petrie was reading the advertisement pinned to the letter: "Personal Service—Literary gentleman, recently paralysed, requires capable, trustworthy, sober manservant. Negro preferred. W. J., 17A Harley Street."

"What beats me," said Petrie, "is why you should bother to consult me at all in the matter."

"Only, I think," Welmon suggested, "to obtain your approval of me. Doctor Jefferson made it quite clear to me that you are to be saved all worry and responsibility in the matter beyond that. Perhaps I ought not to have handed you that clipping. . . . I'm sorry. But I am afraid that I was led to forget my instructions in that respect by your manner, sir, your—your *grasp* of things. . . ."

"Welmon!" Petrie exclaimed quite suddenly. "Do you smoke a pipe."

"I could very easily refrain from doing so at any time," said Welmon, "if you prefer it; that is to say, if were you to prefer it, in the event . . ."

"Let's have a look at the pipe you smoke," said Petrie.

He produced one from his pocket and handed it to Petrie.

"H'm," said he, examining it. "I prefer them curved. I should be very greatly obliged, Welmon, if you would take a walk as far as the High Street and get me a pipe. I should look upon it—without prejudice—as a great kindness. Curved stem, decent-sized bowl, not too heavy. He has some very good ones at eight and sixpence at the corner of High Street and Station Road. When you come back, there will be some lunch for you here, with me, and we can talk things over."

Welmon looked at his watch. "Thank you, sir. You are extremely kind. I shall be very happy to get your pipe; but I ought to hurry away and catch a train, to call upon another prospective employer if—if you think that the chances are against your engaging me. . . ."

"The chances," said Petrie, "are very decidedly in favour of it as far as I can see. Though I do not as yet know all the

details of the scheme. . . . My wife will give you some money for the pipe."

"Oh, that will do very well when I get back." He rebuttoned his coat and stood up.

"Perhaps, then, you would be kind enough to ask her to step up and see me as you go down. I think you will meet her in the hall."

He was right.

"Elizabeth," said Petrie as she came in, "I believe you are up to the neck in this thing." He was half bantering, and half—something she could not understand. "I believe you knew even about this Welmon."

"I did not," said she. "That is—I mean—well, he did say it might be a negro."

"Oh!" said Petrie, and smiled. "And your innocence has been so perfect. . . ." Suddenly his smile went, and in its stead came a frown. "Betty—what *is* this idea? . . . Oh Lord! I'm not a child. . . ."

"The idea," she said very slowly, "—*their* idea—is for you to live in a place by yourself, w—with no one to worry or fuss you. With just that brute to take care of you and some woman, Miss Stringer—no, not Stringer, she's the actress—Miss Stark—to type your work and your letters for you. That—that is their idea. Mine—my *suggestion*, Charles, you already know." There was something fine in the way she squared her shoulders and straightened her lip to get the cold, ordinary quality into the last remark. She would urge or advocate nothing; she was merely stating facts.

She was, therefore, unanswerable; and Petrie had no answer for her.

He could only smile and say, "That 'brute,' by the way, is a very highly polished person. Incidentally, he is somewhat of a philosopher—and he will be back in a few minutes, to eat some lunch with me. What I wanted to ask you is, if—supposing—supposing I were to vouch for his character and all that sort of thing, do you think you could—could fit him in with—with what you have described as your scheme—your idea."

"Any *detail*," said she promptly, "can be made to fit in with my scheme."

She stood looking out of the window, her back turned to Petrie. Both of them were silent, till she said, quite casually, "Well—here is your philosopher back again, with a parcel," and strolled out of the room.

. . . . . .

§ 4

When Mrs Petrie had taken away the tea-tray, she sat down again in the window to her darning.

Petrie had spent the three hours since Welmon's departure in writing. He now laid the board down upon the table, and lighted the ashes in his new pipe.

"'s extraordinary how that fellow has braced me up, Elizabeth!" he exclaimed.

"Not so very extraordinary," she suggested quietly; "considering that his is the first new face you've seen in weeks."

The form of Petrie's answer to this observation astonished her. It was a peal of laughter such as she had never before heard in that particular room. Then said he, "Bless my soul! . . . Here have I been trying for hours to say something about the exquisite hideousness of that countenance and you are quite satisfied to let it go at 'a new face.' You are wonderful, Elizabeth. . . . Why, the spots of high light on his forehead and his cheek as he sat in that window were *green*. Yes, my dear, green, I tell you—phosphorescent—and flat and as big as florins."

She darned away quietly while he smoked, and then she said, "I must say he struck me as very intelligent and civil. I gathered from his having lunch with you that he is somewhat different from the ordinary servant class of person. What exactly do you propose to do with him, Charles?" She did not seem to be asking these questions easily; yet they were vital to her, for her needle stopped in the air, though she continued looking at the heel of Conrad's sock pulled tight over the smooth round pebble inside it.

"I—I've been thinking a good deal about that suggestion of yours, Elizabeth," Petrie said slowly. "Confound that fellow, he left the tobacco out of my reach." Mrs Petrie

came over and handed him the tin, but went immediately back to the window and the sock and the needle that did not move.

"Yes," said Petrie, "there is a good deal in it to be thought about. As a matter of fact, I hadn't thought of anything in particular—very much—except keeping Cynthia out of this affair, and—oh well, about one or two other things in which no one can be of any help to me. You were perfectly right. I have been just sore and peevish lately."

"I didn't say peevish," she corrected him.

"No. Morbid was your word. Well, possibly morbid too, a little. I suppose it would be called morbid, to leave the development of things to chance."

They fell silent again, and remained silent till the needle once more ceased its plying—this time for want of light. Petrie had used his last match, and his pipe was out.

"Time I was seeing to the supper," she said, gathering up her wools. "Would you like to rest quietly till it's ready, or shall I give you a light?"

"No, never mind about the light, Elizabeth," said he. "I should like a match, though, and a quiet smoke."

When she had handed him a new box from the chest of drawers he looked up at her and said, "We'll move into the flat, Elizabeth, as soon as young Jefferson can find some way of getting us into it."

"Oh, Charles," she said.

"Charles!" and her voice broke upon the word, as he snapped for her the suspense she had lived in for five days and nights. . . . It was useless for her to try to conceal her tears. The most she could do was say once more, this time in a whisper, "Charles."

"Betty," said he, very gently, and touched her hand. "You mustn't do that, you know."

"I know." She fought her tears. "I—know. But oh, Charles. . . . I—I am so *grateful*. . . . Letting me try again. . . ."

"Betty. . . . Really, you mustn't, you know. It isn't like that. . . ."

"Oh, isn't it!" said she stoutly. "Well, I *mean* to try,

all the same. And not to fuss or worry you either, poor boy. You will *see*."

She dabbed her eyes symbolically, and walked, erect, out of the room.

§ 5

After the knock of the evening postman she came up with his post: two or three weekly papers, some odd letters and circulars, and the envelopes from his press-cutting agencies; it was enough, at any rate, for her to be able to say to him, "Well, there's enough to keep you busy till bed-time, and I've got heaps to do downstairs," to pick up her darning, and to retire, without dishonour or disorder, from the room.

Petrie picked up a paper and began to read the random thoughts of artistic idlers on works of art (including an allusion to his own art), and the burblings of political idlers on politics.

One thing that Petrie hated beyond all others was what he called the 'journalistic mind.' He had always subscribed to the weekly masterpieces of journalism, that he might enjoy a weekly orgy of contempt, and know, occasionally, the good fun of writing to one paper a few words about the inanity of another.

But to-night there was no orgy, no prospect of fun. The stupidity of the fellows was unassailable and could not matter a fig to anyone. He flung down their lugubrious rectangles of thought, divided one from the other by a line of five wide-spaced asterisks, and picked up an illustrated paper, which was (and is) innocent of thought of any description.

The first picture was of a politician addressing a crowd from the window of a railway carriage. Petrie looked long at it.

It was not for the politician that he cared a straw, nor for the nonsense that he was in the act (bareheaded) of talking.

It was the crowd that held Petrie's eyes, till they glowered upon it in lust and hungry longing.

Movement! Life! The jostle of hurrying people, and the sweat of humanity in the strife of daily living. . . . These were of the things he could know no more; the things that called him from afar, so that he must feign to hear them not

or else die—choked with the tears that could be his only answer to the call. . . .

Welmon the nigger could hear the call and answer it. Even now he was probably strolling from Jefferson's rooms, down Regent Street to Oxford Circus with its lights and sputtering shadows from the great arc-lamps. Grandly oblivious—but one with them all in the might of his limbs—he would play his part in the tremendous mystery of life with policemen and prostitutes, politicians and flower-girls, newsboys, waitresses, cabmen, and loafers. . . .

Petrie bitterly cursed his luck, but in cursing it he said no word. He only thought of the warm, damp London air that playfully smites the face of a loiterer as he rounds a corner. He thought of sunshine beating gloriously upon the head and shoulders of any man who might chance to trudge up the cinder track to Wilton's Hill, of the tightening of muscles as one trudged the last steep bit of path, of the loosening of hamstrings as one relaxed to sit at last upon the bench. . . .

There was a ring at the bell, an opening and a shutting of the front door; but there was no hum of voices in the sitting-room below him, so it could not have been George and Sylvia that had rung the bell.

The picture on the next page was "A New and Charming Photographic Study of Miss Madeline Stringer."

The words were offensive to a degree, nauseating—though they stated nothing whatever but the truth. The study was both new and charming. It was Madeline to the life, as Madeline's press photographs always were—lips slightly parted in a smile, eyes wide open and gazing full into the lens of the camera.

So they gazed now into the eyes of Petrie. As he looked back at her he smiled, till only the glow was left in his eyes from the expression of hunger and longing with which he had looked at the crowd on the railway platform.

For many minutes he gazed at Madge, smiling and musing at the casual oddness of the chance that brought her picture before him at that precise moment.

He gazed till Mrs Petrie came in.

"What's the boy doing to-night?" he asked. "Still in his precious catalogues?"

"N—no," said she, with curious hesitation; "he went out about half an hour ago."

"Visiting the brother-in-law," Petrie suggested. "It's a great pity that George can't afford to buy a car. That boy will know no proper sleep till he has persuaded *some* relative to buy one."

"Yes," said Mrs Petrie eagerly; "quite likely."

She began to gather up and tidy the papers scattered on the bed.

"Sounded rather like a telegram about an hour ago," said Petrie casually.

"'m. . . . Yes. . . . Did, didn't it? . . . Want these again to-night? Shall I leave them on the table?"

"Was it a telegram, Elizabeth?"

"Well—I believe—yes, it was a telegram, Charles," she stammered. "Conrad went to the door, you see. I—I believe I hear him coming now."

She heard, as a matter of fact, no sound at all. It was a mean, deliberate lie; but she had no alternative. She made hurriedly for the door.

He stopped her as with a pistol shot. "Elizabeth! You've got to tell me. Was it Cynthia? Ill . . . or coming home suddenly—or anything of that sort?"

"No," said Mrs Petrie quietly, and he believed her. "It's nothing to do with Cynthia."

She went down to the dining-room, and began once more to wait.

When, a few minutes later, she did hear Conrad, she went to the door to meet him.

"Well, dear?" she asked, her hands upon his shoulders.

"Oh—it—it took a deuce of a time to get him," Conrad said, "and when I did get him, it was the very dickens trying to hear him."

"Well?" she asked again, still holding him. "He—he knows, dear. I had to admit it."

Silently, and deep within himself, Conrad swore a great oath. To her he said quietly, "Knows *what*?"

"That there was a telegram, dear. And he must have guessed by now that it was from Doctor Jefferson." She clutched suddenly at the lapels of Conrad's coat, raised her face to his, and said, "Darling boy—tell me——"

Once more the great oath reverberated in Conrad's soul. For an instant he was baffled, staggered by the demand upon him. Then, with a casual shrug, "We can bluff him easily enough, mummy," he said, wondering how the blazes they could succeed in bluffing him. . . . Suddenly, by the purest chance of inspiration, he lowered his head and whispered the single word, "Car."

It was a wild lie, but it acted like magic. On the instant she loosed her clutch upon him and stood back. "Oh, dear," she said wearily, but relieved; "I—I do hope it will be for the best."

They went into the sitting-room, where Conrad looked about him.

"Nothing to drink, I note," said he. "Thirsty work, sitting in a telephone exchange, staring at two homogeneous young women, and waiting for a trunk call."

He went into the scullery and drank a tumbler of water.

"Been up to see him lately?" he asked, when he came back.

"Yes, dear, only a few minutes ago."

"Was he—cheery as ever?" he asked next, doing all he could to make the question appear to be the merest accident.

"Oh yes," said Mrs Petrie. "He was deep in his papers and things."

"Well," said Conrad, then paused. "I—I'll tell you what, mother. You just scuttle along up to him and keep him company. I'll come up presently and turn him in. . . . 'bout half an hour or so. . . ."

"But, my dear . . ." she began to protest, a little puzzled.

"Oh, just an idea I got from young Jefferson," he explained. "If that blighter doesn't marry Cynthia, by the way, I'll eat my hat. You see, the governor might get bored at times, being left alone so much. . . . Must be pretty dull. . . . If you go and keep him company for a bit . . ."

"It always seems to me," said Mrs Petrie, "that he enjoys being left alone; particularly when he's got plenty to read."

"Oh yes, rather," he agreed. "Anyhow, he'll be champing at the bit over this telegram mystery now, so run you along up. You can let on that it was from Jeff—contents unknown. I'll find some contents for him." He gave her a knowing, confidential look that sent her smiling from the room.

. . . . . .

§ 6

When the door had closed behind her, Conrad stuck his fist under his chin and knitted his brows together in uttermost perplexity. "Ker-*rist*!" he said wearily. Even to his inmost self Conrad burlesqued, and he burlesqued even his blasphemies.

When he heard his mother coming out of the bedroom he went in to the old study and furnished his pockets with a screwdriver and an adjustable spanner. Then he went upstairs.

"And what of young Jefferson?" Petrie asked as he drifted in.

"What's all this I'm hearing about young Jefferson?" said Conrad in his best manner.

But Petrie remained tiredly serious. "Out with it, boy," he said.

Conrad very seriously answered. "The silly idiot. I'm blest if I can see why he wanted all the bother and fag of being rung up. He only can't get down till a good deal later to-morrow. Not till—till the afternoon, in fact."

"H'm," Petrie remarked. "I was not, as a matter of fact, expecting him till quite late in the afternoon. Not before six."

Conrad cursed again, but said, very calmly, "Later than that, I mean. That's just the point, though. I can't see why he should want to keep a fellow hanging about the post office for nearly an hour over a footling thing like that."

Petrie laughed. "Poor old boy," said he, with great compassion. "It is one of the big tragic facts of life that at your particular stage of development, when you feel that you have most to conceal, the technique of deceit and concealment is at its poorest. You fail dismally, and will continue failing

for the next three or four years. This time, too, you made the elementary but grave error of taking a woman into your confidence. . . . What, in short, about the car ? "

" Damn ! " said Conrad, this time bravely aloud. But secretly he was delighted. The thing was developing splendidly according to plan. He fidgeted with the spanner in his pocket. " Such wisdom," said he, " is thine, O merchant of slaves, that thou canst guess the restest for thyselfest, no doubt." He was beginning to trust more now to the chance turns that conversations had a way of taking than to his own powers of directing them. He drifted across the room and sat down upon the bed.

The conversation did not develop at all. His eyes, roving aimlessly about the room, rested at last on the wooden joist above Petrie's head. He raised his eyebrows and softly whistled. " Well, I'm jiggered ! " said he.

He drew the chair up close to the bed and climbed upon it. In an instant the spanner from his pocket was adjusted to the nut that held the joist. " Well, I'm hanged ! " he remarked. " Just as I expected. . . . Cracking like billy-o."

Petrie was looking up at the wood. " Cracking ? " said he. " I don't see it."

" Possibly not," said Conrad drily. " But you might admit that even you are not likely to see the crack along the top of a beam when you happen to be lying under it."

The nut was off by now and in his pocket. He carried the chair round to the other side of the bed, removed the other nut, drew the rope out of the pulley and flung it over the bottom of the bed. Then he lifted off the beam, which was as sound as a bell, and got down.

" Let's see," said Petrie.

" Half a jiff," said Conrad. " I might as well take a squint at the other one—' while I'm on my feet,' as the poet sings."

He laid the joist on the floor out of Petrie's sight, and moved his chair again.

" N—no," he said, examining the ends of the bottom joist. " This is not so bad. . . . It'll do for the time being." But quite casually, while he spoke, he drew the rope of the second pulley, made a coil of it and hung it over the door-knob.

"Let's see the crack," said Petrie. "That carpenter fellow must take the thing back. He swore it could never crack. He put in an iron tube or something."

"No need for him to have it back," said Conrad. "I can fix it up with a clamp—to-morrow." However, he made no move to show it to Petrie, but stayed by the door, his hand upon the coil of rope.

"I'll tell you what, old fellow," said Petrie, on a sudden inspiration. "I wish you'd move the sound one up to the top here, and push the tackle through again, so that I can hoist myself up in the morning."

"Oh, I'll hoist you up in the morning, at any time you like," said Conrad. "I shall be getting up at sparrow-cough myself to-morrow."

Petrie studied him very intently for a few moments, while he as intently studied the name stamped upon the handle of his spanner.

"Conrad," said he. "I have quite suddenly begun to take a violent and passionate interest in the cracks of that beam." His eyes wrinkled up in the old, whimsical smile. "Show 'em to me, young fella."

Conrad, bluffing to the last, shrugged his shoulders. "I've had enough of mechanics for one day," said he. "I'm dead fagged—off to bed. You can see it all to-morrow." The morrow, he saw, would have to take care of itself. He had, for the moment, achieved what he had set out to achieve. The cord was in his hand.

So he lighted the candle at Petrie's elbow and turned down the gas. He tucked the joist under his arm, drifted loosely back to the door.

Before he could open it, Petrie, still smiling at him, said, "Liar! . . . Poor, miserable, rotten, inefficient liar. . . ."

Conrad hesitated. But he had got the jolly old beam and the rope; he kept on reminding himself of this, exulting in it. And he tightened his hold upon them.

"Come and sit down, old fellow," said Petrie, gently. Then, after a pause, "You can't do it, old man—not at your time of life. No man can expect to lie with any hope of success till he is at least forty. Even then, many are called, but, as

in all art, few—very few—are chosen. I do not think that even after forty you will be one of them. . . . Too much of the bulldog breed business about you, too little of the Celt. . . . Poor old boy; I must say I don't envy you the last hour or so. . . ."

Conrad had nothing to say to that. He stood exactly where he was, fumbling for thought, unobtrusively wriggling his ankles about, but holding, for all he was worth, to the trophies he had won.

"Sit down, old fellow," said Petrie again. "Sit down, and we will make great sport of young Jefferson."

"He is a bit of an ass," Conrad admitted. He sat down on the edge of the bed, with the precious joist still under his arm.

"You—you don't mean to say that you were in the least —er—impressed by the things he said?" Petrie asked.

Conrad shook his head. "Didn't see how you could possibly be such an idiot," said he.

"Precisely," said Petrie. "That is exactly what I meant. Thank you for the tribute. I should like to know, then, why you went to all this trouble of dismantling my machine."

"The blighter made me promise," came through the lump in Conrad's throat.

"The blighter," said Petrie, "will experience some minutes of extreme discomfort to-morrow."

"Yes," snorted Conrad, "and then he will see what a fine mess I made of the job. . . . He said it would take some doing—to do it properly, without your catching on to it."

"I wonder what the devil could have put it into the fellow's head?" mused Petrie.

"Gitche Manito, of course. . . . That black-eyed Chirgwin friend you were closeted with most of the day; Whistling Rufus."

They paused, intent apparently on nothing but each one's evading the other's glances in the flickering candle-light.

"Well," said Petrie at length. "You can put it back again, now, old fellow, can't you?"

Conrad hesitated. He looked up at his father under his lowering brows; looked down again. "The beggar made me promise," he mumbled.

"Very well," said Petrie; "but what about making me promise too?"

"'m," said Conrad.

"To—to be perfectly honest with you, old chap," Petrie went on, "speaking now as man to man, I think I'm over the worst of this affair. It's only beginnings that are really hard—readjustments. I've done all that now; got readjusted. So you can give them back to me—ropes and staves and all the rest of it. I'd miss my old engine, you see. . . ."

Still Conrad hesitated. He had won the things very hard.

"My hand upon it, Bassanio," said Petrie.

They shook hands, and Conrad unfolded himself, and got, once more, upon his feet.

The situation was tense, too tense to have a prolonged existence with Conrad. He shrugged his shoulders, and summed it all up: "Having made which speech, and feeling to the inmost spine of him a first-prize idiot, the lad climbed very cheerfully to a point of vantage and proceeded to do the old man's bidding. . . . With a nay and a no, and a ninney-ninney-o."

Petrie watched him upon the chair, tightening up the nuts with his adjustable spanner. "I perceive, Conrad," said he, "that the great secret of Life is already yours—namely, to stand slightly to a flank of it, and to meet all its problems in a spirit of benevolent neutrality. . . . By the way, I venture to suggest, in the light of recent disclosures, that young Jefferson will be here in time for lunch to-morrow."

"As a matter of fact," said Conrad, "he is catching the nine-seventeen in the morning."

Chapter Five

§ 1

PETRIE argued that since a Venetian palace could be turned into a railway station or a Limehouse dock during the fall of a curtain on a stage, they need have no bother whatever about moving a simple household from Pelchester to Adelphi. Kimber, his landlord in the High Street, would manage it.

With astonishing dispatch he did so.

The flat below Petrie's original one had been taken over as well, and prepared for Mrs Petrie, Conrad, and Miss Stark's office. The old flat contained Petrie's bedroom and study, and the dining-room.

They had been there about a week, when Conrad went with Jefferson to buy the car, and to see what arrangement could be made for getting Petrie's wheeled chair into it.

As soon as the body had been adapted to their requirements, Conrad insisted on a run. Jefferson suggested that they should try it out for the first time without Petrie, so it was arranged that he and Conrad and Mrs Petrie should go. Jefferson mentioned it casually to Madge, and Madge at once said, " Do stay out a couple of hours or more, Jeff, if you can. I must have a talk with Hal."

. . . . . .

§ 2

She began her talk by saying, " It's so absurdly hard to treat you as an invalid, Hal; and still—it's quite impossible to talk as though nothing had happened, because so much has. It's just like having to begin all over again—it may be only your old beard that makes one feel like that. But—but Hal dear, I—I've a tremendous lot to say to you."

He was dressed in the old Pelchester tweed suit with the

bulging pockets, seated in his chair in the window of the study. Through the floor came the muffled rattle of Miss Stark and the typewriter.

Madge moved her chair a little nearer to him, and laid her hand upon his, waiting for him to answer.

Slowly he raised the hand to his lips, slowly lowered it again. "Dear, funny old Madge," he said, and looked out of the window. Presently he looked at her. "Look at this," he said, and pointed to his feet.

Madge looked down, only to say "Well?"

"Ah," said Petrie, "you do not perceive. As long as I was in the habit of walking, I wore—in season and out of season—soft, shabby slippers. Now that I have no use whatever for my feet, I take a tremendous pride in wearing boots; and Welmon takes as great a pride in lacing them upon me. For a space of twenty years—as long as I was a provincial clerk, my delight lay in wearing negligible collars and a vast, flowing cravat; but the moment I became an artist of international repute, I began to adorn myself as a stockbroker. That is a most interesting trait of human nature, and it is to be the spiritual plot of our next comedy. I had just begun to work upon it when you came in."

"I want to *talk* to you, Hal dear," she said, a little impatiently. "About *us*, I mean; not, for the moment, about comedies."

"And can you be so very sure," said Petrie, "that we are not among the comedies, you and I?" It was not as bright repartee that he put the question; it was said softly, and quite earnestly, with just a touch of the old whimsy.

"I don't know," said Madge, "but even if we are, there is no reason for us to be fools over it. . . . We had a talk once—a big talk, do you remember, about four months ago. . . ."

"We carried that talk to completion," he said quietly.

"M'yes," said Madge, "if one ever can carry such talks to completion. But you must remember, Hal, conditions have altered since then. Things have happened."

"On the contrary," said Petrie, "nothing whatever has happened, Madge." He looked quizzically down at his feet again and added, "Nothing, I mean, that is not merely a

prank. Our means of locomotion have undergone slight modifications, but we are still, essentially, what we were then. We talked then, decently and fairly, and came to a decent and fair decision."

"Yes," said Madge quietly, "and the decision included certain things. . . . I have tried to be decent and fair and generous. I am trying now to play the game by everyone, dear, just as you always play the game, but—but I simply must say this thing first, and have done with it. . . . I mean, when we decided things as we did decide them that night, I was to have a great deal of you, Hal. I was to have all, in fact, of Harold Rockleigh—and Harold Rockleigh was to have all of me."

"Never did I agree to any such thing, little Madge," Petrie said very softly, stroking her hand and playing with the ring upon her finger. "And never, my dear, would you have suggested it. We were only to love, Madge. We agreed that we were to remain for ever what we were—you a poor player upon the stage, and I a jester with my cap and bells. We were to go on playing and jesting, because we could do it so uncommonly well. We were to love—but we were to go on laughing and weeping the laughter and tears of the great blind, dumb thing—Life—that cannot laugh its own laughter and weep its own tears. We loved—and we decided that night to keep Love in our lives as we lived them—not to take it away and hide it in a new life in some shady corner of a suburb, or some country stronghold."

"Yes," said Madge, "but there is no Harold Rockleigh any more. You see—oh my dear, dear Hal—when we had that talk, it was not a question of choice between me and—another person."

"Is it now, Madge?"

"*Yes.*" She became quite calm again. She had gone, time and time again, over every link in the chain of every argument. This, she knew, was an essential point that had to be made. "Yes, it is," she repeated. Then all of a sudden, the lucid arguments became blurred and obscured. All she could say was, "Oh Hal, I *am* trying to be fair, my dear—fair to both of us."

Petrie very gently patted her hand. "I think I know the conclusion you have come to, little Madge," he said; "but let's hear the arguments that bring you to it."

"There are no arguments, Hal," she said. "It is only a matter of fact. I love you, my dear. For some reason or other, we did not behave about it like most other people would have done. We were just careless and happy, instead of worrying and miserable. Ever since you came into my life, it all changed for me. Art changed for me; It was only then that I began to—but there; that is nothing but trying to tell you that I loved you, and you know that already. The main thing to consider, Hal, the *fact* that I spoke of, is that I am a much stronger woman than your—than Mrs Petrie."

Petrie, taking her two hands in his, laughed softly at her. "Madgie," he said, "you're cheating, you know. You're trying to manage me; trying to tell me that I should be less trouble to you than I am to her."

"That isn't what I mean," said she. "At least—not quite that. I mean, dear, I am fitter to—to—I am a fitter mate for you, Hal. One ought to consider that, now that you need . . ."

"All I need now," said he, "that I did not need before is a negro; some one who can pick me up in his arms if need be—all six feet odd of me, and lift me from one place to another. Such a man is Welmon."

Madge pondered a few moments, feeling the caress of his cool hands, staring out of the window. It was time, she decided, for her trump card. "Suppose you saw that it was too much for her, Hal?" she asked.

Petrie did not immediately answer. His hands continued, listlessly, to caress. He too stared out of the window. "Lord, yes," said he. The faintly bantering tone had gone. His words came listless and weary. "And isn't that the real hell of it?"

It was not a question, but it turned her round immediately to face him. "Don't be so absurd," she said. "I only meant that—that—well, she is rather a frail little person, isn't she?"

"Yes," said Petrie, still listless and bowed by the thought

she had started in him. "You meant, though, that she is looking strained and worn?"

"I meant no such thing," she retorted. "How *could* I, when I have only known her for a few weeks? I said she looks frail; and I—am very strong."

Petrie smiled at her, patted her hand, but said nothing.

"The fact of the matter is, Hal," she went on, "that you are not really trying to discuss this thing, as you did discuss it once before. You don't seem to be in the mood. Perhaps it's the new—comedy—that's on your mind. . . ."

"You are not trying to discuss it either, Maddie," he said gently. "And the fact of the matter is that the discussion was over four months ago. You are trying now simply to manage me—to reverse the old decision."

She was silent some moments: then drew her chair still nearer. Her arm stole through his, her head rested on his shoulder. "Facts—facts—facts!" she said, contemptuously. "Hal, there is only *one* fact, dear boy. I love you with the same old greedy boisterous love that came to me in the very first minute that I saw you and heard you speak. It is miserable being so utterly without you; and—" tears were in her eyes, tears choked her voice; "and to see you, to think of you—stuck away by yourself, wasted on some one who does not—who cannot—love you as I do. Oh Hal, how *can* she love you as I do? It—it makes my heart ache to think of you so. . . ."

Petrie stroked her cheek, felt the tears upon it. "So you are beginning to be sorry for me," he observed. "Well, I suppose, sooner or later, that had to come. . . ."

"You're just trying to exasperate me, Hal," she said impatiently, and moved away from him. "Yes. I *am* sorry for you. And I have told you why. But I am a good deal sorrier for myself. I would not be sorry for myself or for you either, if you had me to—to be with you—to go on loving you."

"And do you think," said Petrie, "that that would be a sufficient profession for a natural artist?—Being with a helpless old buffer—loving him? I say 'an old buffer' simply because I happen to be one, and a cripple—to boot. But it applied just as much when my locomotion was normal. No, dear girl.

Being near another person is an accident, something like a shower or a burst of sunshine. It is not a profession, a career."

"Career!" she mocked. "Profession! What are they to me? You have been my career, my profession, ever since the first moment I saw you. Women are like that, you know, Hal."

"We were speaking of artists, Maddie."

"I suppose I am not much of an artist, then," she said. "Was I anything of an artist—till—till five years ago? I was mediocre, through and through. The only thing that can make a great artist of a woman is being loved by an artist. I am no artist, Hal. I—I—you are just everything to me. . . ."

"You are a very great artist," he said slowly, "and so, by the nature of things, nothing in the world is 'everything to you.' Everything is its very own, and that is what makes you an artist."

For a moment his restraint was gone. He gathered her two hands in his, bent over them as far as the leather strap around him would allow, kissed them and pressed them to him. "Madge," he said; "little Madge. . . . If you only knew what you do to me, with these sacrifices, these offers of life and soul to me. . . . Oh, they are a torture . . . ghastly . . . unbearable. . . . And some of them are so deucedly comic! Old Jeff with his 'bachelor diggings' for me; Conrad; that blithering George with his spare bedroom; Welmon; Miss Stark. . . . Lord! I thought I had opened the eyes of all of you—but you only laughed—and went your several ways, with your eyes still shut."

"But to sacrifice, as you put it," she said, "is itself a joy—sometimes."

"And precisely that," he said, "is the uttermost hell of it." Then, bitterly, he continued: "And the responsibility of assigning this joy of sacrifice to a particular person rests upon me? . . . Well, I have taken it." Very slowly he filled his pipe, lighted it, and then went on, smiling upon her through the smoke. "You are a wonderful creature, Madge. You have performed the miracle of making it possible for a man —for a man of quite average decency and scrupulousness—to

talk to you, and to caress you so, in this particular room—and to hold his head up to himself the whole time. . . . But I just want you to think of another woman—a woman of a totally different kind. . . ."

"As though I haven't!"

"I know—but think like this. Compared with you she is a very little thing, a pigmy. Unlike you, she is no artist: nothing, I mean, where she is concerned, is its own. Things only exist for her just in so far as they are hers. She is simply and entirely Woman. She began her little life by being what you suggest—and what I once suggested—*your* becoming. She adopted me, or rather she accepted me, as her career. However, what I meant to say is, that she knew the lean years, my dear—and they were devilish lean. I see that now. She bore them. It might be necessary to admit that she bore them badly; but she bore them. She also bore, incidentally, four children; and one of the four will become, I think, a rare musician. . . ." His eyes kindled upon this thought. "That is something," he murmured only half aloud; "that is something!"

Madeline watched him; then, without a trace of bitterness, said, "I suppose you had to think that of me. But it isn't true. I have thought of her, Hal dear; but that doesn't make anything easier. Liking her, even positively liking her—I cannot help loving you—and wanting you for myself. I think of her. I am thinking of her, even when I say this. . . . I —I don't mean to suggest that we should elope, you and I, and make a tremendous smash. No; I only mean that we should—there, you see, I have no plan, really. But can't we *make* one, Hal dear? Something just a little like it was before. I don't know the details, and somehow it's hateful to talk about them. But—but, your *nearness*, Hal; your mere presence, surely, *surely* it is more to me than it can be to her. . . . I could retire, Hal. It is best that I should retire, now. . . ."

With a jerk upon the wooden rim of the wheel, Petrie twisted his chair so that he faced her. "*Retire*!" he exclaimed. "My God! retire—!" and then quietly, "Rot! Idleness and drift—for you! . . . Listen, Madge. You have heard this before, and you know it to be true. It is according

to the measure of what they *are* that people *do*. You are a maker, a creator—and so I have loved you, and always must love you—for what you are. Can you begin merely to carry and to fetch, now?—to *rot*, Madge? I should hate you, and despise you. But you could not do it. You would fail in the attempt to become a coolie, to fill in, with a loose programme of fetching and carrying and a little sewing, the intervals between this vague loving. . . ."

Suddenly, as he had become fierce and scornful, he became quiet again, and gentle. "We've got to play the game, Maddie. . . . Not only in the boy-scout sense of the word. I mean the game, in the bigger sense: Life. It's a bigger thing, this 'Life,' than you and me and little Betty—bigger than each of us, and all of us put together. We are really quite little things, we people; we don't matter so very much, one way or the other. We hop and strut about on our hind legs, till perhaps we are struck down for a while into a sitting posture. . . . But this Life, Madge, this vague something outside us, of which we artists succeed occasionally in catching a glimpse—it's bigger, much bigger, and goes on whether we walk or get pushed and pulled about in a chair. . . . And you speak of love, Maddie, as though it were a little thing, a—a circumstance—as though . . ."

She laid her hand upon his, stopping him. "I have been afraid, my dear, that you felt at—at a disadvantage now. You must know what I mean, Hal. How—how was I to know whether, perhaps, you wanted me but were afraid, just because, now . . . I just wanted to tell you, to *assure* you that you are the same to me, and more, my dear. . . ." She dashed the tears from her eyes, and smiled at him. "I could have said that in the first sentence, couldn't I?"

Then she placed her hands behind his head and kissed him.

He closed his eyes, breathing the fragrance of her, drinking of her might and life and vigour.

"And you would be willing to rot," he said softly; "to *rot*; to throw it all up—Life. . . . Madge! would you? If I would let you?"

She smiled. "If it could do you any good, I would be very

happy to lie in the street and let your Black man drive your new car over my body."

"But if it could do me no good—if it could end only in your own destruction?"

"Then," she said, "I suppose I would begin very seriously studying the part you have written for me—the greatest part, old Freddie says, that has ever been written."

"And you would be playing the game!" he exclaimed.

Madeline had moved to the window, and was looking out of it.

"And is it utterly necessary," she asked, "that I should see you no more?—Except at your tea-parties?"

"It is not necessary that you should look out of the window," said Petrie, "when you are asking such perfectly civil questions."

She turned, and leaned upon his desk.

"I—I suggest," he went on, "that you come and take lunch with us, like I came and lunched with you in the old, pre-sedentary days, once a week, and stay and talk to me, Madgie, till whenever you must go."

She sprang across to him and laid her hands upon his shoulders. "Oh, but could I, Hal?—*dare* I? Wouldn't—oh, my dear, it would be perfectly hateful for—for her to think. . . ."

"Are you not still a friend of mine?" said Petrie.

"Well!" she said, "I don't feel ashamed of myself. I can't and won't."

"I am only surprised," said Petrie, "that you should feel called upon to say so."

"But it would hurt, Hal," she said; "it would hurt terribly, for—for Mrs Petrie to think—that I—oh, but what is one to do if one loves?"

He was silent a moment, looking at her. "That," said he, "is a question that I have failed to answer, even to my own satisfaction. Our present civilisation is an attempted answer—and a poor one. . . . But the thing that beats me, Maddie, is the astonishing reasonableness of all of you."

He was wondering, too, whether she would have been so reasonable if he had been a little less sentimental.

Madeline burst in upon his wondering. "Reasonable! D'you think it's reasonableness that makes me agree with you? . . . It isn't reasonableness, my dear—it's just what you said about the lean years. It—it made me feel so small; so unfit to demand anything. . . ."

Petrie slowly shook his head. "Oh no," said he; "it is what I say—your very good sense. You have all been so wonderfully sound. Possibly it is I that have educated you all. . . . At any rate, there is only Cynthia left now. There will be all of you to help with her. We shall see how she behaves over it, in about a month's time."

§ 3

A week later, Conrad was about to drive Petrie and Mrs Petrie and Madeline out in what he always called (for fear of exposing his emotion if he used any serious term) the "Jigger."

As a concession to Mrs Petrie, he was not to take the wheel till the worst of the traffic had been negotiated. A mechanic from the garage was to drive them as far as Ealing.

Half of the back seat of the car was detachable, and Petrie's chair occupied the spare cubic space into which it is always possible to squeeze the fifth person and the sixth; so Conrad was forced to travel to Ealing by train and there await them.

He came into the study, and Petrie handed him a telegraph form. He read, "Petrie Grand Hotel Edinburgh Accept immediately well done Petrie." "Right," said he, pocketing it. "I'll send it from the Strand. So long. A quarter to three, don't forget. And keep the blighter up to it." With that he allowed the spirit to carry him rapidly away towards the District Railway.

Petrie smiled after him; then he wheeled his chair into the window, and reread the letter that lay open in his lap.

It was for the third or fourth time that he was reading it, yet the gestures of his shoulders and the hand that held his pipe, the twinkle of his eyes and the nodding of his head showed a delight that was unlikely to be exhausted by a score of readings.

Madeline came in while he thus read and chuckled.

"My dear girl," said he; "you would never guess what's happened—not in a thousand years. They gave another show at Edinburgh a couple of nights ago, and Cynthia's reception was enormous. And *then* what do you think? . . . Old Wilkes has asked her to join his American tour. She'll be with Sebaste, if you please—who was *my* contemporary. Sebaste will make her accompany her. . . . And she's twenty-three! What do you think of that?"

Madeline sat down. "Dear old Hal," she said; "you *must* be pleased."

"Pleased!" laughed Petrie. "My dear girl, that is lovely. Pleased! It is like Elizabeth describing Welmon's visage as 'a new face.' Yes, I am pleased. . . . But would you believe it?—She wasn't quite sure whether she ought to accept! She wondered if she ought not to consider her original work—composing. Bless my soul, I believe the only factor that really weighed in favour of the thing is the fee—five hundred guineas. I suppose if she had known the black secret of Hal Rockleigh's doubloons, she would have refused it. Imagine that—refusing a tour in America—with *Sebaste*—at *twenty-three! Lord!*"

Petrie seldom spoke in italics; when he did, the italics meant a great deal.

"Well," said Madge, "possibly it is only the paternal blessing she is after. She probably accepted days ago—knowing quite well that she would get it."

"Rot!" said Petrie. "I gave her the freedom of—of the *world*, years ago! She knows that."

Mrs Petrie bustled in. Seeing the letter in Petrie's hand, she smiled and said, "Oh, so you've heard the news, Madeline? Good-morning, my dear."

"Yes," said Madeline. "Isn't this fellow just like a great schoolboy over it? . . . But I'm not surprised. At twenty-three . . ." she shrugged her shoulders. "Well, I suppose things come more easily to some people than to others."

"We must go along to lunch," said Mrs Petrie. "The boy extracted all kinds of promises from me before he went. We must hurry."

The two women went out, followed by Petrie, his bony

hands manœuvring his chair over the little ramps that Conrad had screwed to the threshold of the doors.

When Welmon had brought in the coffee, Petrie said suddenly, "I say—suppose that girl were to refuse, after all!"

"Why should she refuse, my dear?" asked Mrs Petrie, "after your advising her to accept."

"Lord, don't ask me things like that," said Petrie. "How should I know why people do these things?"

"Of course she won't refuse," said Mrs Petrie. "You are just fussing now, my dear. We ought to be hurrying."

"Yes, indeed we ought," said Madge. "It's me that Conrad will blame."

"If I had told her to wire her decision . . ." Petrie began, but Welmon came in just then to announce the arrival of the car.

. . . . . .

It was on Haven Green that Conrad had arranged to meet them, just beyond the station.

As the car pulled up, and Conrad lounged upright from the railing upon which he had been leaning, near the cab-stand, Petrie caught sight of a sign that swung over a shop door. It was a small square sign—the national coat of arms in red upon a white ground.

"Just a minute, old fellow," he said to Conrad. "Before you get in, just send off a telegram for me. You've got the address. Just—'Wire decision and address.'"

"Good Lord!" grumbled Conrad. "Still worrying about that confounded girl. Just pull her along to the Post Office across there, Smith."

Madge, seated beside Petrie, took no notice. Mrs Petrie, in front, looked round for an instant. Then she looked ahead of her again.

Petrie merely pulled out his watch, and saw that it was ten minutes to three.

"*Now*," said Conrad, as he climbed into the place vacated by Smith. "You are about to see some dust. We've done this bit of road before. How long did it take us, Smith? Just

under the half-hour ? Well, we shall see." He pulled on his goggles. " By the way, dad, you don't want to keep this fellow hanging about here, do you ? Couldn't he just as well meet us at the house ? "

" Oh, my dear," said Mrs Petrie, " we agreed, you know. . . ."

" You hadn't seen me drive then, mother," said Conrad.

" Have we now ? " suggested Petrie. " Still, I think we might risk it, Elizabeth. It would be a noble end."

" Right," said Conrad. " We'll be back at the flat between half-past six and seven, Smith. You've got the number."

The car moved off, leaving Smith in the forlorn nudity of a mechanic stripped of his machine.

Now that Conrad was driving, Petrie seemed to take a fresh interest in the affair. He leaned back and began, in high satisfaction, to fill his pipe.

" This is great, Maddie," he said, turning to her. " Perfectly great. I could do it for myself, if it was not for those harmonium-pedal things that you have to work with your feet." He stooped forward, pulled up the rug to screen his match, and lighted his pipe.

Suddenly he exclaimed, " Hang it ! I *could* do it."

She only smiled at him, but the smile said, " Poor old Hal."

" Well, we shall see," he went on. " To the dickens with those pedal-things ! I shall put it to the boy. He will think of a way."

Then he settled down to quietly smoking his pipe, holding his matchbox over the bowl to keep the sparks from flying.

He looked at Madge's profile, at Mrs Petrie's ear and palely flushed cheek ; at the little, greying ringlet that fluttered against it. And he looked at the knuckles of Conrad's broad hand upon the wheel ; at the easy, negligent pose of his feet upon the brakes. Once, he looked at his watch.

With a rattle and change of gears, they took the hill of Harrow.

Rattling again, and slowing down to the bending road, Conrad brought them at last to rest at the door of the George.

" How's that ? " said he, glowing. " Isn't she a wonder ?

. . . Come along ; this is the spot for us—all on the ground floor, and a very fine line in teas."

He opened the door and fitted the folding ramp in place for Petrie's chair.

" Why should those confounded things have to be worked with one's feet, Con ? " Petrie asked, as Conrad wheeled him round the car.

" Always are," said Conrad.

" Yes, but why ? "

" Much easier," said Conrad, paying scant attention to the question in the difficulties of disentangling the chair-wheels from the rug. " Got feet, might as well use 'em, I suppose is the theory."

" Haven't got feet," said Petrie, " can't use 'em. . . . Try again, old fellow. What I mean to say is, why not one's arms or elbows or one's chin in lieu of feet—if, for any reason, one preferred it ? "

" Oh ! " Conrad exclaimed. " You mean—by Jove, dad, what a stunning notion ! I don't see a bit why those cranks shouldn't be lengthened out to come up under the arms like crutches—no, I'm hanged if I do ! What a perfectly spiffing notion—Lord ! what a pity you're such an idiot with machinery, dad ! . . . Remember that typewriter effort of yours ? "

" Nonsense, my dear fellow," said Petrie. " A typewriter is quite a different story. Putting a typewriter together is work for a watchmaker. This thing is nothing but a harmonium—a pair of pedals and a few stops and there you are." They came up with Mrs Petrie and Madge in the porch of the hotel. " You will soon have the pleasure of being driven out by me, my dears," he said.

Mrs Petrie said, " Oh Charles ! "

Madge nodded up to a group of boys in their flat straw hats on the road above them. " *That* is where you ought to be, Hal," she said.

Conrad pushed the chair across the hall as she and Mrs Petrie went upatsirs.

When they were out of earshot, Petrie turned and said furtively, " Look here, old chap ; mum's the word—but I

want you to get us back as sharp as you can after tea. It might be necessary for us—for me, I mean, and either you or Welmon with me—to catch the night train up North."

"Night train? . . . Up *North*? . . ." mumbled Conrad in astonishment.

"Yes," said Petrie. "Don't bother now, though. Welmon will do if you . . ."

"Go on!" said Conrad. "You bet I can come. But I say, aren't you rather . . ."

"I don't think you understand, old man," Petrie said slowly, and in saying it he seemed suddenly old and very tired. "You see, even if she does accept the American thing, she will probably come home before she goes. And—and—well, you see, you made such a capital job of breaking the news of this silly nonsense of mine to Freda. I—want Cynthia to get it the same way—even better if possible, because Cynthia is a—a little different from the others, you know. The best way would be for me and you to run up together, then she would have to see that everything's alright, wouldn't she? You—you can help me with this, old man. Your vernacular's a tremendous help. . . ."

Conrad knew instinctively that he would always remember that fragment of talk, that startling glimpse of a weather-beaten man appealing to him—a man whom he had always casually assumed to be incapable of appeal to anything. They were at the far end of the hall, in the shadow of the stairway up which his mother and Madeline had gone. In front of them was a palm in a large brass pot upon a mahogany stand; beyond that a stained glass window. Between himself and this was his father's rugged head, turned round towards him, his voice hushed and conspiratorial. . . .

"Right you are, dad," he said, feeling that somehow he was more impressed than he need have been, that the thing was not really as important as all that. "We'll tootle off as soon as we get back. What about a wash?" He pushed the chair round the bend behind the staircase.

The incident was closed; the glimpse shut out again.

"You needn't be afraid of my doing you out of the car altogether, Conrad—when I can drive it for myself," Petrie

said. "Only it would be such fun to feel that one—one's *self*—was making a thing move again, making it skip and bound along the way the car does. Why, boy, you would scarcely believe how great it is to sit even in this old chair that you thought of for me, and to send it bowling across the study floor. . . ."

Another glimpse. . . .

"Poor old beggar," mumbled Conrad; and then aloud, "It will be mainly a question of getting the correct angle on the shafts for your brake and clutch. It might be necessary to have upright spindles as well, and some sort of socket arrangement. But I'll go and see the merchant Jeff and I saw about folding up that back seat and making the ramp. He's got some sense. . . . What exactly is the row about Cynthia? Couldn't I just run up by myself and save you the fag? Mother'll kick up a fair-sized dust, you know. . . ."

"Oh, there's no particular row," said Petrie casually; "I don't want her to be upset, that's all. Don't let's be late in getting home. We can talk of it in the train."

Petrie was thoroughly himself again. Conrad wondered what it was that could have impressed him so tremendously a few minutes before.

They joined Madeline and Mrs Petrie at a table in the large window overlooking the garden.

"Elizabeth," said Petrie, "Conrad has just designed a car for the use of gentlemen lacking adequate feet. It might require upright spindles and some stockinette. . . ."

"Oh, shut up," suggested Conrad. "You'd all look rather silly if there's a patent in it, wouldn't you?"

The question was treated as rhetorical. Mrs Petrie said, "Charles, you're *not* serious, are you?"

"Indeed I am," said Petrie.

Madeline said, "What did I tell you about those boys on the road? We might just as well recognise it. He's a perfect baby."

Conrad looked at him once or twice, to see him eating toasted scones in the old manner, ravenous as after a swinging stroll to the top of Wilton's Hill; and he thought of the angle that would be necessary on the brake arm. He heard Petrie's

nonsensical remarks; he heard his own grudged laughter. Once he saw him slip his watch out of his pocket and frown over the time, and again there came over Conrad the feeling that had come over him in the hall, the vague feeling of something big and portentous.

"We must not put too great a strain upon our pilot," Petrie said, openly looking at his watch when they had finished tea. "There is a good deal of traffic between Ealing and Oxford Street, Con, and Madge wants to be home in plenty of time. . . ."

But Conrad was already paying the bill.

They stopped to drop Madeline at the flat in Hanover Square. "Well done, Conrad," said she; and then to Petrie, "I should think that you have already learnt everything there is to learn about driving a car, Hal—the way you have been watching."

She ran up the steps, waving her hand to them, and the car swung on.

Petrie again leaned forward to watch Conrad driving.

The movements held him fascinated, as they had held him all the way from Harrow. . . . It seemed a royal, a splendid use of energy—the hairbreadth movement of a hand, the pressure of fingers or thumb that sent a ton of matter leaping, bounding, and swerving; the almost imperceptible pressure of a foot that checked and reined in the throbbing, mighty force . . . and *he* would be able to do it—he who had not the power in his limbs to carry the weight of his own gaunt frame. . . . To Petrie, with his immaculate ignorance of all machinery, it was a mystery, a stupendous miracle.

Lethargically—but magnificently—Conrad dropped his hand out over the side of the car. The policeman nodded, and they swung into the Strand. From the Strand, with a clank they swung aside towards the flat. Conrad's fingers moved; the engine ceased its throbbing, and they trundled serenely down the slope, stopping at their very door.

Welmon appeared on the instant with the wooden ramp for the four stone steps.

He pushed the chair up into the hall and came back to Conrad.

"Miss Petrie is here, sir," he said bluntly, but under his breath.

Conrad checked the curse that stirred within him. He concentrated on the thought that Welmon was an idiot.

"You mean Miss Freda," he said.

"No, sir; Miss Petrie," said Welmon.

Well, what if she *was* there? thought Conrad. What the devil did the fellow mean by sneaking down to him with the information in that ridiculous manner?

But his questionings failed to reassure him. He felt the old feeling again, of portents in the air, of ordinary things charged with extraordinary import. . . . He felt that something was in a mess, or very soon was going to be. . . . He ran up the steps to Petrie, waiting in his chair.

"No need to tear your shirt over catching trains, dad," he said. He hesitated, saw that hesitation was idiotic, and rapped out, "She's here, you see."

Mrs Petrie hated lifts and had gone up the stairs, leaving Conrad and Welmon to bring Petrie up. Conrad was glad that they had the hall to themsleves. He wished that he could have got rid of his information before Petrie had looked at his watch, which he was slipping back into his pocket.

"What?" said he, still preoccupied with making calculations involving minutes, and the distance to King's Cross.

"Yes," said Conrad; "upstairs, in the study probably."

"Cynthia?" said Petrie, baffled by the incredible thing; "Cynthia—*here*?"

A voice from the landing above them very cheerfully said, "Yes, are you coming up soon, daddy? . . . Or shall I come down?"

Petrie looked up for an instant at Conrad. Once more he had that look of appeal that had filled him with so much astonishment. Then he winced, "Oh God," and fumbled with trembling hands to put the rug in order about his legs.

Conrad usually pushed the chair by placing his hands upon the wicker back of it. This time he pushed by placing them upon Petrie's shoulders.

Thus they passed, silently, into the lift.

Chapter Six

§ 1

CYNTHIA stood at the grille on the top landing, waiting for them.

First she kissed Conrad as he stood behind the chair, scowling upon her.

Then she laid a hand upon Petrie's head and stooped, touching his forehead with her lips.

"Well . . ." she said, holding him thus to her—too close to be watched by him. "Well, my dear. . . . You—you're a nice one."

It was dark in the lift and in the landing outside it, and so she tried to linger there. She wanted him to know only the calm of her, the cheerful serenity of her voice. Her face she proposed, somehow or other, to keep hidden from him. It was pale and wan, the eyes sunken and smarting.

Crumpled in her pocket were the six pages of Sylvia's neat writing; words that had stung and bitten her with cruel reproach as she had read them, first in the bedroom of the Grand Hotel in Edinburgh, and then, over and over again in the train, till the mere act of looking at them—though she knew every pedantic phrase of them by heart—was an intolerable pain. ". . . Broken, bedridden, and helpless . . . great future before him . . . of course it is all gone now. . . . She, poor little soul, after all she has gone through . . . worn to a shred with anxiety and worry . . . the responsibility of my own family and affairs and daily worries . . . all *we* could do, you may be *sure has* been done by George and myself . . . not the slightest hope . . . all the most expensive specialists from London. . . ." And she, Cynthia, had meanwhile been travelling about in first-class carriages, having her breakfast in bed in first-class hotels, grinning back at a thousand idle idiots who grinned up at her and knocked their hands together and stamped their feet upon the floor like so many

goats or asses . . . ". . . No hope . . . broken, helpless, bedridden . . . had to face it all quite alone, poor little soul . . . worn to a shred with anxiety, work and worry. . . ."

But Cynthia had done with *thinking* about it. The time had come for action. Her eyes were opened now, by Sylvia. . . . Only she did not want Petrie to see her face just yet.

Conrad growled, "Get your feet out of the road," and shoved the chair along the passage into the light of the study.

She stood beside Conrad, still and slightly foolish, behind the chair. He for his part would very gladly have kicked the silly handles that stuck out at him from the desk drawers.

He perceived that this was another of those occasions that could in no way be improved by his presence; the atmosphere was charged with the very devil of a shindy, though God only knew—in detail—what the shindy was going to be about.

"Well—I expect Smith's hanging about for his two bob," he said. From the door he added, "Shout if you want anything. . . . There's a bell behind you, Cynthia."

When the door had closed she was beside Petrie's chair. She was glad he did not look up at the pallor and the sunken eyes that belied the stoutness of her heart, the coolness of her perfectly good common sense.

With her two hands she gently drew his head to her breast and once more kissed it.

"Daddy dear," she said softly. "You—it was very wrong of you to do this. You ought to have told me at once."

For a while he rested in her caress, silent, his eyes closed. Then he loosed her hands and thrust her gently from him. "We—we've got to buck up, little Cyn," he said—slowly, without heart, as though he were only an instrument for the speech of another. "You—you have got to get back, you see."

Very calmly she placed her hands upon her hips, drew herself up, shrugged her shoulders. "My dear," she said with a calmness to suit the langour of her gesture, "I'm not *going* back. So you need not worry about *that* again. Not ever."

"Oh Cynthia." The words were no more than a groan. "You—don't you see you *must* go back? . . . To-night. At once. . . . I was coming up myself, with the boy. I knew

something was. . . . Oh Lord, you don't have to tell me that it was that idiot of a Sylvia. . . ."

She made no answer. She drew up a chair beside him, then flung down a cushion instead and sat at his feet, her hands clasped upon his lifeless knees. "There would be no point at all in our arguing about it now, daddy," she said very quietly. "I have made up my mind, you see!"

Petrie saw that it was true. Wearily he looked into her face, and got no comfort from it. She smiled at him, but there was no hope to be had from the smile, inscrutable and utterly firm. Then he jerked his head aside.

"Made up your mind!" he snapped.

This was the very thing that he had been dreading to fight, simply because he had no weapons whatever for fighting it. To stouten himself, he snapped again, "Made up your mind, indeed! . . . You have swallowed a lot of hysterical nonsense, poured out over you by an uncommonly stupid woman —a woman, moreover, about to have a baby. I knew she would do it—confound her meddling, muddling, mumbling imbecility—and I could not stop her! I could only trust to your own good sense. . . . Here! stop that confounded car. It hasn't gone yet. . . . You must go *now*, before there's any more . . ." He banged his hands upon the rims of the chair wheels, to swerve himself to the window.

But he saw her, very lightly, touch his knee; he saw her, still smiling, shake her head. "It's no good, my dear," she said gently, and his hands fell away from the wheels, helpless. "I couldn't go back—not even if I wanted to. Can't you imagine the kind of row I had to have with old Wilkes this morning? He might sue me, even, for breach of contract or something. I expect I shall have to give up all the fee. But what does that matter, now that I know we are so rich? You do see, don't you, that I can't think of going back?"

She got up and calmly helped herself to a cigarette from the mantelpiece and sat down again. Petrie's face was sunk in his hands. He said nothing.

"It's no use worrying, daddy dear," she said. "I suppose you haven't got used to it all yet, but I've been thinking it over for a whole night and day. It's all settled. I can go on

with my composing; and you—great person that you are—can go on with your work. It—it will be ever so jolly, dad. You mustn't take things so—to heart. Things are no different, you know—really. . . ."

The supreme absurdity of her trying thus to cajole and wheedle him into good morale brought a smile to Petrie's lips. "My dear girl," he said, but the oddness of it was great beyond words.

"But I ought to be composing—*working*—since I've got it in me. . . ."

"Your *apprenticeship* is not yet served," said Petrie. "It won't be till after the American tour—and a dozen others."

Again she smiled. "My dear! Of course the American tour is off too."

"Lord!" Then suddenly he sat upright and flung out his hand. "Hand me that thing, quick," he said, pointing to the telephone upon his desk. "If Wilkes is up North still, I might be able to get hold of Toppitt even now—they always did hang on to that office of theirs till hours after everyone else had gone home. I'll talk to him: you can still go back."

He was excited, hot upon a plan.

Cynthia was startled by the familiarity of that tone in his voice; but it struck her cruelly that he should be talking thus without stamping his feet by the fireplace, or pacing up and down the room.

"They—he, old Toppitt, might remember me still," he said, his hand still outstretched.

"He does," said Cynthia, in cold triumph. "And so the less *you* have to say to him the better, my dear. Have you forgotten that you did exactly the same thing to them twenty-seven years ago, when you had a quarrel with some one, right in the middle of a tour? Old Wilkes hasn't forgotten it, as he pointed out to me this morning. You see, it's no good, daddy—*worrying*. It's all settled."

Petrie's hand, from pointing to the telephone, fell limply to his side. "Oh Lord!" he said.

Slowly, with head bent forward, he went on reproachfully, "This is not at all the kind of thing I expected—from you." Therein he was mistaken. It was exactly and precisely the

very kind of thing he always had expected from her, ever since the night of Sylvia's wedding when she had drawn herself up from the hips and faced him. It was what he had always felt to be the enigma of Cynthia—the potentiality in her of taking up an utterly untenable position and holding it unshaken and quite unshakable.

Now, therefore, he had nothing more to say. He had already said the extremest thing that lay within him; the uttermost reproach.

She, for her part, had expected extreme things from him, so she was quite undisturbed. She stroked his hand, and said, "You see, daddy, you always think you know what's best for everyone. But I know what's best—*now*. You must go on; and I must go on. The real thing for me is composing—I am really a Creative Artist. At least I want to be one. Now that I know what a great person you are, and how well off we are, I mean to try. I know you can make me an allowance, my dear, because you always have." She paused, satisfied with the conviction her arguments carried. To clinch the matter she flung her cigarette-end into the fireplace and said, "I'm sick to death of being a potty concert-artist, a huckster of other people's wares."

She moved a little nearer to him, looking him in the eyes with the frankness that comes of pride in a fundamental lie.

"I—I could be near you a lot of the time, daddy dear. . . . I could play to you—if you felt like it sometimes."

He could say nothing. As his hand had dropped to his side, so his whole spirit fell flat—helpless, listless, after stretching out for things like the telephone, that were no use.

At last he managed to pull up the rug about his knees, and to mumble inconsequently, "Must be time to get ready for dinner, my dear."

§ 2

The days slipped into weeks.

Petrie fell into a depression from which nothing in the world seemed capable of rousing him.

There was, in point of fact, just one thing that could have

raised him up again ; but he was the only person in the world who knew of it, and it seemed to be the one thing in the world that he was quite incapable of communicating.

In an attempt to communicate it at the end of a morning's submersion in this utter gloom, he would say, " Cynthia dear —can't you—*won't* you go now ? " But he spoke like a child, appealing hopelessly, to an elder. " Go, my dear, and do what you have to do—what you can do so uncommonly well. It is that, and that alone, that people will gladly pay to hear you doing. . . . You are doing nothing at all here. You are only rotting. We are all rotting. . . . I am very well. . . ."

She could see only that he was black with depression when he said he was " very well."

Like the elder, gentle but very firm, she would place her finger to her lips and say, " S-sh ! Enough of that now—we've had all that out, you know. I *am* working—working all the time, and when I go home in the evenings, I try it all over. You just ask Freda, my dear ; she's sick to death of it. My head's just full of things. . . ."

She was, however, lying ; her head was immaculately empty of notes, and the piano in the flat in Chelsea was never opened. But Freda, too, was prepared to lie. They agreed, as they sat at night, and talked it over, that something had to be done ; that it had all been too much for Mrs Petrie, that she was looking run down, worn out. . . .

Freda saw the difficulty ; she saw the change in Petrie since Cynthia's return. But Cynthia was hopeful ; she was sure it would wear off as soon as he got " used to things." Besides, if she was ever going to be a composer, she might just as well *start* by being a composer. . . . From such remarks she would drift into reminiscences of evenings when the applause had become measured, rhythmic—like the pulsing of one colossal heart. She would tell of the crowds—miners in Wales, factory hands in the Midlands, mechanics on the Tyne—seething masses of fellows outside the town halls, who pushed off their bowler hats and opened their blue jaws to cheer her passing. She told of the artists with her—of those that liked her, and those that obviously and emphatically did not ; of funny old Charlie Wilkes, the ageing, cigar-mumbling Jew

who shook her hand in both of his, who lauded and applauded —till finally he had stamped his feet and raved, cursing her father and her father's father and herself and their seed for ever. . . .

Thus midnight would come upon them; and the piano would still be closed and silent.

Cynthia would say, "If it were not for mother, I could manage it all quite easily, Free. Why—he could even come about with me. But there, what's the use of talking about it—mother would never hear of it."

Mrs Petrie added her arguments to Petrie's that she ought to go back to her work.

She said that she was being very silly and unreasonable; that she was only getting upon her father's nerves. . . . He was a changed man; it was a wonder Cynthia didn't see it, as everyone else saw it. Doctor Jefferson was beginning to be terribly worried. He even went so far as to admit that he was beginning to be terribly worried. . . .

But Cynthia only shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

"My dear mummy," she would say, "If *you* would only take a little rest and comfort now that I am here—(and I intend to stay)—there would be a great deal less for any of us to worry about. If you would only get a little colour in your cheeks. . . ."

Mrs Petrie would retort, "I have never felt better or happier in my life."

Cynthia, however, could see only pallor and frailty; therefore she shrugged her shoulders and said sceptically, "I am very glad to hear it. But that is not going to prevent my staying and keeping an eye on things. I can do just as good work here as anywhere. . . ."

. . . . . .

§ 3

Petrie remained glum and morose and utterly cheerless.

Sir Frederick Winterton came with Madge to see him about the tragedy. Cheery and chubby as ever, he waltzed into the study, with his studied affectations—his monocle, his

gold-knobbed cane, the colossal gardenia in his button-hole, and his inevitable, "Hello, Hel, Old Artist! well met and all hail!"

The man who answered him, sitting up in a wheeled chair, was not the "Old Hal," angular, drily comic, and leg-pulling. It was a solemn and irritable, but polite, invalid.

He talked of the play, but not as he had talked of the other plays—resenting cuts, refusing to alter, throwing out sly, neat little charges of vanity and silly egotism. He talked as though he were, on the whole, slightly bored by the affair; as though it were, in fact, some one else's play.

Sir Frederick left him disturbed and subdued. He shook his head as he and Madge stepped into his car. "You've got to buck up, dear Artist," he said to her heavily, "and do something to our worthy mutual—or else, before many moons are waxed and waned, there will be no more high-class drama for you and little Fred."

But what was she to do? . . . Beyond going to have a talk with Jefferson, she could think, for the moment, of nothing.

And Jefferson could think of nothing.

One night, just because he could stand it no longer, and because he and Petrie were alone together after Cynthia had gone home, he turned sharply to Petrie and burst out, "Look here, Hal, you're no fool, and you know as well as I do where this kind of thing leads to. Just you pull yourself together, or its melancholia. You're an ass to let this mooning, Hamlet attitude get such a hold on you. I know what's worrying you, old fellow, but if you would only buck up, she would feel that she *could* go. . . ."

"What do you mean—Hamlet attitude of mind?"

"Oh—this 'Time is out of joint,' rotten, moping business," said Jeff impatiently. "Can't you see that you've given the girl a shock? She would have a better chance of getting over it if you would only keep your end up a bit better—as you did keep it up till she came home. If you would only . . ."

But Petrie obviously was not listening. He was staring straight in front of him, slowly wagging his head from side to side. "No use at all, old fellow. . . . It's a thing you positively can't outwit. Do what you please, in the end it gets you."

"What gets you?" snapped Jeff, exasperated by his lugubrious head-wagging.

"Same old thing," said Petrie, "the parasite business, I mean. . . . You've got to *end* your days, whatever else you may do incidentally, living off some one else. I thought—yes, I did actually think—that we had managed things just a little better here. It seemed to me that little Betty and I had struck a decently fair bargain—arrived at some thing like a balance. But Cynthia has gone and upset it. . . . Lord, I don't want her life! but how the blazes is one to get her to believe it?"

Jefferson said, "When you have managed to give up soaking in that rotten state of depression you've got yourself into, there might be some hope." He knew that he was saying the wrong kind of thing. He paused only because he seemed to have tried everything else. Then suddenly he snapped, "Look here, Hal! if you don't do something towards cheering up, I—I'll marry Cynthia. I've had enough of this cross-purpose business."

Petrie did not turn upon him, as he had done once before. Lugubrious as ever, he said, "Well—no. I don't think there would be anything in that. . . ."

Jefferson felt foolish. He knocked out his pipe and said, "All the same—I've warned you now. . . . I will."

Having made his threat, he departed.

. . . . . .

§ 4

Petrie, however, did not cheer up. He remained exactly the same; idling the mornings away seated before his desk, the afternoons seated in the window with a book.

Cynthia moved cheerfully about the house, trying by her brightness to brighten the others. She hummed as she sewed, and smiled as she talked, trying to destroy Petrie's gloom by ignoring it.

One day he said to her, "Come and sit down here, Cyn, and let us talk this thing out. You must see that it can't go on much longer."

"What can't go on?" said she, trying, in the manner

usually adopted with invalids, to give an air of triviality to everything except the really trivial.

And, as is usual with invalids, Petrie was irritated by it. "*This*," he snapped, and waved his arm to indicate himself and her, the room, the flat, and the world in general. Then, more calmly, he went on: "You must face things and realise where we stand. I may last like this for years. I am still a youngish man, and might very well live to the age of eighty."

"Of course you might, my dear," said she. "Doctor Jefferson says that this kind of thing very seldom affects the general health of a person. But surely there is nothing in that to be miserable about."

"Don't be a fool," said Petrie wearily. "What I mean to say is, do you propose to go on trying to wait on me—when I already have more people than I could possibly require to wait on me—for the next thirty years? You see, Cyn, I am very anxious to understand you—and you to understand me. . . . Is this arrangement a thing you propose for the next thirty years, or is it to be only an interlude—for a little while?"

"First of all," said she, "*you* have got to realise that if you think I am here to wait upon you at all, you are very much mistaken. I am here to work—just as much as you are. If I can be a little help to mother at the same time, even if she won't let me *do* anything, so much the better. . . ."

"Does she want your help?"

"It doesn't matter if she wants it," said Cynthia firmly; "she is going to get it. You ought to know as well as anyone what mother is, my dear. . . ."

"Oh yes, I know," Petrie winced, "I know exactly what you are all saying and thinking. . . . I am altogether too much for your mother. . . . It's wearing her out. . . . But it's a lie, Cynthia; before God it's a lie. . . . Ask *her*. . . . She is very well; at least——"

"But of course she is very well," said Cynthia, knowing better than to quarrel with a sick man. "No, my dear, it is only for my own sake that I am here—to work—writing——"

"Writing fiddlesticks!" said Petrie. "I know just how

much you have composed in the last seven weeks. . . . Just about as much as I have."

"Well," said Cynthia, quite unruffled, "who expects a creative artist to keep going all the time at the same speed?"

"I wish to the Lord you would not use such nauseating phrases as 'creative artist.' It—it is intensely journalistic." He paused, then went on with a sneer: "So that is the way you put it to yourself, is it? Waiting for inspiration? Let me assure you that you will continue waiting for some time. But Lord! I thought you had a temperament; a temperament in *my* sense of the word—an impulse towards effort that persists in spite of the state of health of a relative, in spite of the chances that make this man or that Chancellor of the Exchequer or Chairman of the South-Western Railway—spiritual independence, my dear girl, of the string of accidents that people call facts. . . ."

Cynthia had not heard him talk in this way for—she hated to think for how long. It gave her a thrill of delight to find him reacting so easily to the things she said to him . . . he was like his old self again. . . .

"But even you, my dear," she said quietly, "even you wrote only three plays in five years. . . ."

"I wrote more like *thirty-three*," said Petrie. "Though only three were any good as plays, the other thirty or so were fine as work. . . . But all that is beside the point." He became suddenly limp again, and drew his hand across his brow. "The point is, that even if you have nothing to say, you have plenty to *do*. You have to live—your own life. If—if you have no music to give the world, you can give it other things. I cannot stand the way you hang about, Cynthia, doing nothing, living nothing, making nothing, futile, sterile——"

"Fallow," she suggested cunningly.

"Fallow your grandmother! . . . No, if you cannot or will not be an artist, you can still be a woman. Young Jefferson is very fond of you. I—I will let him propose to you."

"Young Jefferson," said Cynthia, with perfect composure, "has already proposed to me."

"The devil he has!" exclaimed Petrie. "When?"

"Five weeks ago," said she. "And four days ago."

"H'm," said Petrie, scowling. Then he approached a smile—more nearly than he had approached a smile for weeks. "So the beggar has been threatening me with an empty gun. . . . And why, may I ask, was he refused?"

"Oh, I don't know . . ." said Cynthia. "I suppose I—I—" she looked away from Petrie, and two spots began to glow upon her cheeks. "I suppose I don't love him, daddy. . . . Childishly, like the lank, inarticulate Cynthia of years ago, she added—"not properly." Suddenly she stood up and laid her hands upon his shoulders. Stooping, she kissed him, and hurried from the room.

Things might have turned out differently if she had not done that.

But the caress was too much for Petrie.

Chapter Seven

§ 1

THE next morning was Madeline's day to come early and stay to lunch. Cynthia accordingly was not due till one o'clock.

Madeline brought her score of the play; she brought also some note-paper, but she did not look at the score, nor did she write any letters. She sat talking to Petrie.

"Maddie," he said, "can even you do nothing? She has refused young Jefferson now."

"Well," said Madeline, "you expected her to do that. At any rate, you wanted her to."

"I *did* want her to," said Petrie; "but, good *Lord*, can't you see the difference? Or are you, too, trying to fool me?"

"No, Hal dear," she said, "I am not trying to fool you, and I never have." After a pause she went on, "Well, you would have been saved all this if——"

"Don't," said Petrie; "for the love of heaven, don't. You—you are playing the devil with me, between the lot of you. . . . Why can't you sit down together and explain things to each other? You all seem to see the point where the other person is concerned, but not in your own particular case. . . . Maddie, why can't you take *her* aside and make her see?"

"Why?" Maddie asked bitterly. "Because she hates me so, dear—and distrusts me. She's so jealous. If I said anything at all to her, she would think it was just because I wanted you for myself. I suppose, Hal, that like the rest of us, she thinks that she herself is the best one to make you happy. . . . But, my dear, I do know how it must make you feel—you always thought so much of her. Dear—I know you won't ever come to me, and I will never speak of it again to worry you—but there is one thing I do want to say. I can't bear to see you like this. . . . Why don't you go away from here, with—with Mrs Petrie, I mean. She—she would let

me come and see you sometimes. . . . She likes me, I believe; and I am quite glad to let her like me, for I've never taken anything that was hers, Hal. That is playing the game, isn't it? She would let me come and be with you as much as I am now. . . . Why have you never thought of that, dear?"

"Isn't that, in effect, what we tried to do here?" said Petrie. "But it's failed, because Cynthia is really afraid for her mother. Her mother is looking—Lord, yes, I can see it myself—she is looking tired out and ill. It is too much for her. . . . Any damned cripple is too much for any sound person. *I* ought to know that. I've been *talking* it for twenty years. . . . She has not the strength. . . ."

"*I* have the strength, Hal," said Madeline softly.

"Yes," said Petrie; "and you have your work, thank God, to expend it on."

"My work. . . . I have been thinking a lot about my work lately, Hal. I think a woman ought to, when she is forty. . . . I must admit that I would like to do this thing," she nodded at the typed play lying upon the desk, "before I do retire. . . ."

"Retire!" exclaimed Petrie. "You, Madge—*retire*?"

She smiled and moved her chair nearer to him. "I know just what you would like to think about that, my dear," she said, "but it is nothing of the kind. People only work, normally, for money. Thanks to H. R., I have made all the money I am likely to require. I refuse to go on at the old game, like some women do, with creaking limbs and a cracked voice, wreathed in withered laurels. Now is the time for me to leave it—leave it for my own sake, in triumph. . . . Then, too, if you did think of going away from here, you and Mrs Petrie, I could be a little nearer to you, dear. She understands, I think, a little . . ." Her chair had moved still closer to his. She held his great hands in hers; she bowed her head to lay her lips upon them. . . .

The door opened with a click and Mrs Petrie stood before them. Petrie's hands jerked instinctively, then stayed quite still. Madeline's twitched to move away, then stiffened where they were.

Mrs Petrie stopped, hesitating at the door—then, smiling, she walked in.

"Well, my dear," said she to Madeline, her hand outstretched in greeting. "And how do you find the Im-patient to-day?" This was her own, her very own, oft-repeated little joke.

"A perfect bear," said Madeline. She took the hand. Then, without precedent, she leaned forward and kissed Mrs Petrie's cheek. "I am sure he ought to get out; and so ought you, you know. I must see what our engineer friend is thinking about. Will he come in to lunch?"

"He will—*to-day*," said Mrs Petrie with a laugh.

While they chatted, Petrie sat quietly looking at them, slightly revising the high estimate he had always had of his knowledge of women. At lunch he turned suddenly to Conrad and said, "How long would it take a decently intelligent mechanic to devise those brakes for me, that we spoke of some weeks ago?"

"They have been ready for just a fortnight," said Conrad. "I've had them out a couple of times. They're first-rate."

Petrie leaned forward eagerly. "Do you mean to say that I can now drive—myself?"

"No," said Conrad. "Keep your hair on. But you can start *learning* to drive, as soon as you care to pull up your socks and wire into it."

"And how long," said Petrie, trying to control the excitement that brought a tremor to the hands that held his knife and fork, "and how long, old fellow, ought it to take a person of average intelligence to master the craft?"

"A week," said Conrad glibly; "but you, with your unique ideas on machinery, ought to break the back of it in a month or so."

Petrie smiled but said no more. He became absorbed in thoughts of movement—of swirling air and scurrying clouds, of the leap of the great car under him, of his own hands that would cause it so to leap.

"What's wrong with this afternoon for a canter?" said Conrad. "We could get out Richmond way, and you could have a dip at it, if you like."

Petrie nodded. Conrad hurriedly swallowed, and rang up the garage.

During the weeks of his apprenticeship to Conrad, Petrie was once more a changed man.

Conrad had been enthusiastic enough in learning to drive the car, but he had cloaked his gusto in the absurd dignity of his age, humanising this dignity at intervals with a joke at his own expense.

Petrie had just the same enthusiasm and gusto, but he did nothing at all to conceal or repress it. On the contrary, he advertised it to the point of bragging.

His liveliness and persistent good humour were a match for Cynthia's own. Thus they two stood out in relief from the rest of the family. They, of them all, were possessed most strikingly of a purpose that cheered them and gave them energy.

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§ 2

He spent two hours every morning with Miss Stark going through his papers: arranging, classifying, labelling, and destroying. Letters that had remained for months unanswered, or answered only with Miss Stark's masterly evasiveness, were now answered in full.

Bluitt, his agent, spent a morning with him in his study, explaining his copyrights and foreign royalties to him, mentioning that the new tragedy was already in the hands of four translators, surprising him with the information that "Hagar Bradley," the absurd "First Refusal," and "Strivers All" were still bringing in a substantial income from such places as Budapesth, Sarajevo, and Darjeeling.

After Bluitt came the solicitor of Bluitt's recommendation. He, with his dispatch-case, accounted for another morning of Petrie's time; and departed again for the city, a well-satisfied man.

Sir Frederick Winterton came, and departed with the dates fixed for three rehearsals. . . .

To drive to the last of these, Petrie himself took the wheel.

At the door of the theatre, Conrad and Welmon wheeled his chair into a ring of press photographers, commanded by the tripod of a cinematographer.

"*Now*," said Petrie, when they were at home again and seated at dinner. "It's done and I can go. '*Nunc Dimittis*,' said I to them all—'damme, I'm orf'—photographers and journalists."

Jefferson and Freda were dining with them. "Off where?" said Jeff.

The others said nothing. The announcement in no way surprised them. The last few weeks demanded a climax. This was it.

Petrie shrugged his shoulders. "Anywhere. . . . Skipping over the country-side, Jeff—filling my lungs with God's good air, cooking myself in His excellent sunshine, moving—*moving*, old fellow."

"Very sound idea," said Jeff, "after the tales I've heard of the way you've been working of late."

"Oh, so you've been hearing tales?" said Petrie. But he smiled indulgently.

He smiled at most things now.

After dinner, when the two of them were alone, Jefferson said, "Suddenish idea, this holiday of yours, isn't it?"

"No," said Petrie; "I've been planning it for weeks. But it takes a deuce of a time to get everything in order. However, it's all settled up now, even to the press, to give the puff to the tragedy, when it's wanted. . . . Old Freddie has astonished me, Jeff. He's going to make a first-rate thing of it. James's designs are capital; a little bit on the lurid side, perhaps, but . . ."

"When do you start?"

"To-morrow."

"H'm," said Jefferson. "It didn't occur to you, I suppose, to take Mrs Petrie with you?"

"No," said Petrie. "The rest will do her good."

"Where do you propose going?"

"Anywhere!"

Petrie was impatient in saying it. "Anywhere at all, so long as there are roads on which it's possible to *move*. Welmon

has been studying maps for the last fortnight—East Coast, probably."

"East Coast would do Mrs Petrie plenty of good," mumbled Jefferson, sucking at his pipe.

"So you, too, are of the opinion that she is breaking down?"

"Don't be an ass," said Jefferson. "But a bit of a change seldom does anybody any harm. . . . I should think it over, old fellow."

"Oh Jeff," said Petrie, and suddenly his tone changed. "I—I'm devilish tired of thinking things over. It's movement I want. . . . Can't you understand that, old fellow? Movement—just hell-for-leather, belly-to-earth, dust-raising *movement*. . . ."

Jefferson looked up to see the dark, sunken eyes fiercely aglow, the knuckly hands grasping the top of the rug, bending it to the shape of a steering-wheel. He smiled at him and mumbled, "Yes . . .

> "'Send the road is clear before you,
> When the old spring-fret comes o'er you
> And the red gods call to you. . . .'

Perhaps she, too, would like it—Mrs Petrie, I mean."

"Good Lord!" said Petrie; "never occurred to me in that light before. . . . Perhaps she would. I'll ask her."

. . . . . .

§ 3

The car sped, humming, along a white dusty road. To the left of it was a line of splendid oaks growing along the ditch of the old Manor House, to the right a meadow of sun-parched grass that began at the road's very edge in the blurred ruts of cart wheels.

Welmon was driving—he usually did in the afternoons, while Petrie and Mrs Petrie lay back behind him. He insisted that the upholstered seat of the car was more comfortable than Petrie's chair, and so, disdaining the aid of ostlers and waiters at the hotel in Cromer, he lifted Petrie bodily out of

it and placed him in the corner of the wide seat. There, with a leather strap and numberless cushions, he built him into a normal position of comfort. . . .

Petrie lay back in his corner, smoking his pipe, smiling, looking up at the flashes of sky through the leaves of the great oak trees.

Mrs Petrie, too, lay back silent and content. To all appearances she slept; or, at any rate, very comfortably dozed. Only occasionally she stole a glance at Petrie, to draw comfort from his contentment and high satisfaction from the speeding hours. . . .

Suddenly Petrie leaned forward and jerked Welmon's shoulder. "Stop!" he almost screamed at him.

Welmon lunged upon the crutches that he, too, used because it took some little time to remove them. Suddenly arrested wheels gritted and crunched upon the dusty road; Mrs Petrie, startled, was pitched forward; and the car came to a standstill.

Welmon twisted his startled face over his shoulder, and said, "Sir?"

Petrie smiled at the alarm of them both, and at the absurdity of his having given it to them for nothing. "Er—all right," said he. "Thanks, Welmon. . . . I—I just thought I'd like to stop a bit and look round."

It had not occurred to him as he leaned forward to touch the negro's shoulder that he would have to make some such explanation as this. "I—I'd like to have a look at all this. . . . A silly, sentimental, journalistic nickname it's got. . . ."

He was making the explanation only because he felt he owed something of the kind. He neither expected nor wanted any answer. "H'm. . . . It is the kind of place that *would* get abused with doggerel and picture-postcards. . . . Lord! there's a fellow with a camera now. . . ."

They followed his dreamy gaze: the unfenced meadow stretched from the road's edge to the jagged cliff-top. Between the broken line of this and the mass of the great branches that curved above them were two strips of blue—the dull, deep blue of the North Sea and the blue of the dazzling sky that bent to meet it.

Thrust bravely upward into the blue, breaking it at the cliff's uttermost edge, stood the ruin of a tower.

Though the tower did still stand, the sky here and there triumphed, gleaming through the cavity that once had been a window and the storm-begotten rifts in the walls.

Petrie gazed out at the crumbling stone, at the jagged, crumbling cliff's edge, and the field of red wild poppies that stretched away, shimmering in the sunlight, to the walls of the tower and the edge of the jagged cliff. . . .

Then he realised that the other two were watching him, expecting some comment.

"H'm," said he.

The others added nothing.

"Wonderful cliffs those," he said next.

Welmon had eaten his lunch with a Guide to the East Coast propped up against his cruet. "Highest in England, sir," said he, "with the exception of Plymouth Hoe."

"Indeed," said Petrie absently.

"Yes, sir. And every effort is being made to save that ruin."

"H'm," said Petrie; "it always is." Then he became aware that the engine was purring away softly.

"Right you are, Welmon," said he.

He looked back over his shoulder, gazing still at the tower, at the field of poppies, at the cliffs and sea and sky. . . .

A stout little man, standing in front of another man and two ladies, fiddled with the cuffs of his striped blazer, twisted his body and drove a golf ball towards the fourth hole of the golf links, where a little flag, red like the poppies, fluttered in the breeze. . . .

The car swung to the left and inland by the gates of the Manor House: sea and cliffs and tower vanished behind the hedge and the trunks of the tall trees.

Welmon nodded to something in front of them, and Petrie looked up the hill a couple of miles ahead to see the red brick and white woodwork of the hotel where they were to spend the night.

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§ 4

At a quarter to ten his pipe was glowing in a corner of the hotel veranda. Mrs Petrie had gone upstairs to take her two dresses out of the valise and hang them in the wardrobe, according to her rite of giving them a good twelve hours of freedom in every twenty-four.

She returned in a few minutes from this task, and drew a wicker chair beside Petrie's. "The tea won't be long now, Charles," she said; "and then I think you ought to go soon to bed. You seem to be a little more tired to-night. Or perhaps it's just the air up here."

"Not very late yet," said Petrie, thrusting his watch from the shadow into the moonlight; "but I seem to do nothing now but wait for such time as we shall be moving again. . . ."

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs Petrie. "What a godsend that car has been. It does seem to be doing you so much good. You enjoy it so."

"'xtraordinary thing," Petrie said, meditatively, "that absurd craving for movement. . . . People who can walk and run have to elaborate the thing into dancing before they get any real fun out of it. For those who can neither run nor walk, bumping and blundering along any old way is good enough. . . . Funny. But it's the only thing that even nearly satisfies, that gives any illusion of freedom and power. It—it——"

A waiter blinked from the light of the dining-room into the darkness of the veranda with their tea. Mrs Petrie welcomed him, for generalities were seldom of any comfort to her.

"You seem to have enjoyed the scenery better than ever to-day, my dear," she said, peering into the cups as she poured out. "You have done nothing but stare at it ever since tea. I don't believe you've read a single word."

Petrie grunted.

His eyes were groping again among the distant, misty shadows of the cliff-tops for the tower and the field of poppies. . . .

"Charles," said Mrs Petrie, "I—I'd like to talk to you a little, some time when you are not tired or busy or—or anything."

"Well?"

She hesitated, loath, it seemed, to disturb the peace of his reverie. "It—it's about Madeline, Charles dear. . . ."

"Well?" said he again.

"It—it—well, there isn't very much to say. Only—it was that day, you know, that I came in that I first began to think of it. It was very silly of me not to have thought of it before, but—but there you are!"

Blessed phrase! it had helped the Petries, old and young, out of many a tight corner. She went on, after using it, a little more easily. "You see, it isn't as though we had all been perfectly happy in London. We haven't. I have seen that as well as anybody. And I said to you—d'you remember?—before we left Pelchester when you agreed to let me come with you, that I would not get in the way of anything you wanted. I meant it, Charles; I mean it still. I—never want to hinder you. And when I saw that we—that you—were not happy in London—it has *not* been quite satisfactory, living in London, has it, my dear?"

"It has not, Elizabeth," he agreed. He marvelled at such humility, such gentleness and calm as hers. "It has not, my dear. But—but—" then his tone changed. He stretched his hand and touched hers. "I believe I am rather tired after all, Betty. I would like Welmon to lug me off upstairs." Again he touched her hand. "You do not stand in my way. . . . Betty, you are wonderful. Wonderful." He said it very low, giving it the quality, not of a mere word, but a profound, actual thought.

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§ 5

The next morning, as soon as ever they had finished breakfast in the sunny corner of the veranda, he filled his pipe and sent the waiter to fetch Welmon.

"Get the car out, please," he said, "and get me into it."

Welmon was a little ashamed of himself. "I—I'm afraid I'm not quite packed up yet, sir. . . . But it won't take me ten minutes to be ready." He took some comfort from the fact that Mrs Petrie was as yet without her hat and dust-cloak.

"Never mind," said Petrie. "You can get that done while I'm gone. I just want to take a little run."

Mrs Petrie got up very quietly and went upstairs.

"See that there's plenty in her," said Petrie. "Want of petrol is the only thing likely to hang us up, when once you get us started."

Welmon hesitated. "You've only been out once by yourself, sir. And it was on a fairly full road then, so that you could have got help. . . ."

"That will be all right, Welmon. You needn't worry. Not very far—along the road we came yesterday. . . ."

"Very good, sir," said Welmon.

He returned with Petrie's cap and gloves and pushed the chair into the hall, where Mrs Petrie, cloaked and ready veiled, was waiting for them.

"We're not actually starting yet, my dear," said Petrie to her.

"I know," she said, "but I just thought I'd like to come too." She looked out at the car, standing in the sunshine. "It's all so lovely."

"I don't know if it's worth——" Petrie began; but she interrupted him with, "But it *is* so lovely."

Without another word, Petrie was in the car and Mrs Petrie beside him. Welmon tried the nuts that held the steel crutches to the brakes and clutch. Then he went to the front and cranked up, and the car slid down the slope towards the village.

No word was spoken till Petrie pulled up at the spot where he had stopped Welmon the day before.

Then, after listening critically for a moment to his engine, he heaved a great sigh.

"I had to come back here again, Elizabeth."

In admitting this, a shyness came over him, and he looked away from her.

She nodded.

"I—I'd heard of the place before, you know."

It would have sounded more like an excuse, if he had not said it so much more to himself than to her. "Some poet-journalist or journalist-poet has called it the Garden of Sleep."

Another long, deep breath was his only attempt to express the solitude, the immensity and expanse of sea and sky. "But I thought that when I came back to it I should be—alone."

"But why alone?" said she softly; "I'm not interfering with you, am I, Charles? I—I try not to."

He came back to her out of the immensity and expanse; and with the coming he became weary. Drawing a gauntleted hand across his forehead, he said, "Damn it, Elizabeth, I've got to go, you know. It can't go on—not for another moment. Just look at those girls!" He said it with such a burst of passion that her eyes mechanically followed his across the poppy-field. But she saw no girls—only the tower, the poppies, and the red flag on the fourth green.

"Look at them!" he continued. "See what they are doing with themselves; and then look at that rotten old tower standing there. A boy could push it over—a thunderbolt ought to fling it into the sea. And yet it stands there, and stands, and stands—crumbling away in tiny, negligible pieces. . . . What is it doing? Only shutting out the light and air and sunshine from a few little flowers—choking them, paling them and stifling them for the few moments of life and colour that could be theirs before they, too, crumble out into the sea. . . . And it is the clinging of their own roots that holds it there. So—so—the fact of the matter is, Elizabeth, that I've got to leave you—it can't go on any more."

"That is what I meant last night, Charles," she said quietly. "She—Madeline is very fond of you; and—and she is young, comparatively. If you feel that you must go to her. . . ."

"Don't!" said Petrie. "She too, and you—you, Betty, who have been so wonderful, I must leave you too. . . ." He glanced at her, timidly it seemed, and then looked away, shading his eyes with his hand.

She, with a quick movement, pulled up her gloves about her wrists. "Oh, in that case," she said, as though perfectly ready, "it is all quite easy. I can come too. I only wanted to make sure about Madeline. But I too have thought it silly of us to stop in London. I think myself that it is time we admitted, you and I, that we are getting oldish and ought to take a back seat. . . . I was old as soon as I had Sylvia. Most women don't get any older after their first baby—either they get old at once like I did, or else they stay young. To me, it makes no difference where I am."

"Lord, look how it has worn you down," Petrie exclaimed, turning to look again at her. "You—you have been such a wonderful comrade to me, Betty—even you, I think, don't know how wonderful. Only Jefferson, somehow, does. But what's the good of that? For your sake now, as much as any of the others, I've got to go; and I *want* to go, Betty. I am only complicating the lives of all of you, shutting out the sunshine and the light, hanging on—crumbling. . . . Yes, I want to go."

He looked up at the blue of the sky, at the white of the clouds that raced before it. "Freedom!" he cried, as though it were a slogan to an army that waited for his word. "Freedom!" Then he turned to her to explain. "Yes, Betty, Freedom—Life—these are universal things; you and I, in the smallness of our tortured souls, we can only think of things that are personal, accidental. . . ." His voice was beginning to rise again; she was sure that it could not be good for him to get so excited. She said, "But that is no reason that I should not come with you. If I *want* to come with you, and if you have no reason why I should not come, surely you are knocking your 'Freedom' idea on the head, if you try to prevent my coming."

He was struck by this new view of the matter.

He leaned upon the wheel to ponder it. Then he shook his head and said, "No, little Betty. You would be afraid."

She moved nearer to him; placed her little hand upon his arm. "Even if I was afraid, dear boy, I would sooner come—with you. But I am afraid of nothing—except being left

behind. Let us go, Charles, let us go right away from them all—together."

Then, forgetting the crutch to the brake, or knowing that he needed it no longer, he flung his arm about her shoulders and drew her close to him. "Betty, little girl," he said in sudden excitement, "you are right."

The purring of the engine became a sudden roar, and the car leapt forward.

. . . . . .

The foursome of the day before was again at the fourth tee. It was the Colonel, the Curate, the Curate's wife, and the Colonel's daughter.

"God bless you, sir!" said the Colonel, as he saw the bonnet of a great brown car bound out of a dip in the ground, above the parched grass and the poppies of the "rough." "God bless you, sir! Look at that for an impudent lunatic!"

The Colonel was a steward of the club.

The car headed straight for the fairway, gathering speed. "One of those American Johnnies, sir," said the Colonel, "or I will eat my hat."

The car bumped, lurched, swerved into the fairway—Petrie had been a little afraid that the grass might clog his wheels.

Two hundred yards of skimming along the close-cropped fairway reassured him. The car had never had such a wonderful chance before. . . . It did give an illusion of tremendous power, that plunging, leaping. . . .

He swerved again off the fairway into the rough towards the tower.

His cap flew off, and the four at the tee gaped—astonished into silence—at the head of a man flung back in wild delight. . . .

"Great God in heaven!" wheezed the Colonel. He saw the danger that leaped towards the car at sixty odd miles an hour: he himself, in his time, had ridden, bald-headed and hell-for-leather at the grinning teeth of death. He gulped for a word of warning, but it froze in his throat; so that he only whispered "Fore. . . ."

The car leaped from the cliff's edge beside the ruin, as a nimble diver leaps from a board. For an instant they saw a flash of sky between its flying wheels and the poppies of the cliff-top. Then they saw no more of it; they only saw the falling of a little stone that the vibration had shaken loose from the walls of the crumbling tower.

"Mad!" mumbled the Colonel. "Mad as a dingo dog, sir!"

THE END

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